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**OSCAR WILDE DISCOVERS AMERICA**

*by the same authors*

CHICAGO: THE HISTORY OF ITS REPUTATION

*by Lloyd Lewis*

SHERMAN: FIGHTING PROPHET  
MYTHS AFTER LINCOLN

*by Henry Justin Smith*

DEADLINES





OSCAR WILDE

*As photographed by Sarony upon his arrival in New York.*

# OSCAR WILDE DISCOVERS AMERICA

[ 1882 ]

BY

LLOYD LEWIS

AND

HENRY JUSTIN SMITH

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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*first edition*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
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*Typography by Robert Josephy*

To my mother.

L. L.

To my wife.

H. J. S.



## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

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Similar gratitude is expressed to Mr. Percy MacKaye for permission to use the letter of Oscar Wilde to Steele MacKaye as it appears in Section 7, Chapter 1, Book Five. Credit is herewith given to Percy MacKaye's book, *Annals of an Era*, especially to an item on page 150 as follows:

"Oscar Wilde: Notes by Percy MacKaye on New Data Concerning his visit to America, 1882. With a six-page *Letter* from Wilde (dated 'Halifax, N. Scotia,' Oct. 11, 1882) to Steele MacKaye. Also outlines by Wilde of *Two Plays*, by himself: *The Cardinal of Avignon*; A Tragedy in Four Acts; and *The Duchess of Florence*; A Tragedy in Five Acts (being the earliest version of *The Duchess of Padua*)."

Chapter XV of Percy MacKaye's book, *Epoch; the life of Steele MacKaye*, contains other information concerning Wilde's American tour.

The authors further acknowledge thanks to Mr. Richard B. Glaenzer for the permission to reproduce the February 28, 1882 letter of Oscar Wilde to Joaquin Miller, originally published in Mr. Glaenzer's *Decorative Art in America; a Lecture by Oscar Wilde*, issued by Brentano's in 1906.

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The quotation at the beginning of Chapter 4, Book Three, is from *Chicago Yesterdays*, edited by Caroline Kirkland, copyright 1919 by Daughaday & Co.



# C O N T E N T S

## *BOOK ONE. THE AESTHETES*

1. "A Most Intense Young Man"	3
2. "Advance Poster for <i>Patience</i> "	17

## *BOOK TWO. FIRST DISCOVERIES*

1. "Nothing to Declare But My Genius"	31
2. Lilies Over Ladies' Hearts	44
3. At Whitman's Feet	62
4. "Tongueless Silence . . . Dreamless Dust"	79
5. The Trials of Guiteau—and Oscar	95
6. In the "Athens of America"	103
7. Lady of "The Battle-Hymn"	114
8. "Gentle, Sweet, and Crushing"	122

## *BOOK THREE. MARCH ACROSS THE CONTINENT*

1. "America—the Paradise of Women"	137
2. "Wild Oscar, the Ass-thete"	154
3. Chicago, the "Windy"	164
4. "A Castellated Monstrosity"	172
5. "The Free-Lunch Route"	180
6. Ice Cream with the Governor of Indiana	191
7. The Beautiful Streets of St. Louis	202
8. A Nation of Orators	218
9. Aesthetes in Leather	231
10. A Three-Bottle Man Comes to California	245
11. Jesse, by Jehovah!	261
12. The Scarlet Aesthetes of Denver	280
13. "Eugene Field Plays It Pretty Low-down"	303

## C O N T E N T S

*BOOK FOUR. EASTWARD, SOUTHWARD, NORTHWARD*

1. Sunflowers in Kansas	327
2. "Adds a New Horror to Death"	341
3. "Most Beautiful Flower in the South"	354
4. Immortalized in Crazy Quilts	379

*BOOK FIVE. "I WOULD RATHER HAVE DISCOVERED  
MRS. LANGTRY . . ."*

1. "The Public Be Damned!"	395
2. "Lily of Love, Pure and Inviolate"	416
3. "Do You Love Mrs. Langtry?"	429
4. "No Wave of His Chiseled Hand"	444
Notes and Bibliography	447
Index	455

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Oscar Wilde	5
Nincompoopiana	9
A Love-Agony	11
Wilde's Love of Flowers	14
"Let Us Live Up to It"	16
Oscar Wilde in New York	19
An Aesthetic Affectation	23
Career	27
<i>Punch's</i> Portrait of "O. W."	33
Jewish Immigration	36
Dr. Tanner	40
The Iron Jaws that Smashed the Southern Pacific Mail	48
Wilde at a Reception	51
Oscar the Apostle	53
"Aestheticism as Oscar Understands It"	56
Portraits of a Lecturer	59
Clara Morris as "Evadne"	67
Window-Baking of Pancakes is Introduced to New York City	74
Lillian Russell in "Patience"	75
A Product of the Age of Invention	82
"The Aesthetic Monkey"	87
George M. Robeson	91
Uncle Sam Ward	97
"Bob" Ingersoll	99
"From Grave to Gay"	101
Guiteau Signing Autographs	105
Mr. Wild of Borneo	
Boston Aestheticism versus Oscar Wilde	

"Innocence Abroad (In Search of a Copyright)"	108
The Serpent Cigarette	111
Little Robert Reed	113
The White House China	115
A Wilde Lecture	117
Caricatures	119
Julia Ward Howe	120
Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson	121
Harvard and Dr. Walker	124
College Life	127
"The Pity of It"	130
Miss Susan B. Anthony	132
Mrs. Elizabeth R. Tilton	134
An Evening Dress	138
Child's Dress	141
Walking Dress for a Child	144
Tabernacle Free Baths	146
Lady's Walking Dress	147
"Lady's Paletot"	150
Corset, Cupid, and Infant	153
Feature Advertisements	157
A Flurry in Wheat	167
The Castellated Monstrosity	175
Pirates of the Road	182
Mutual Admiration	184
What a Trifle May Embroil Nations!	186
"Aesthetic Politics"	194
A Marvel of the Age of Invention	199
Sunday in St. Louis	207
Rev. David Swing	213
Where Wilde's Western Tour Began	221
The Red Hot Stove	228
Lampoons Sold on Trains	239
Lily Langtry	243

## ILLUSTRATIONS

xiii

The Balloon Car	248
Science of the Beautiful	250
Packing Plant	250
Kearney in Jail	251
Corset Ad	254
A Craze in 1882	258
Edison's Cure	260
Murder of Jesse James	265
The Body of Jesse James	267
Mormonism Cartooned	272
Mrs. Jesse James	274
The Mormon Tabernacle	276
"Wilde on Us"	283
The Poor Chinee	288
Tennis: Back Stroke	291
Overhand Service in Lawn Tennis	295
Underhand Service in Lawn Tennis	299
Highway Robbery	307
Leadville Miners	312
"The Aesthetic vs. the Material"	317
Coiffeur of the Aesthete	321
School Building	331
Opera House	335
Robert Ford	339
Lacrosse	345
Jewish Immigrants	346
Nature and Culture	351
Guiteau's Death	361
Jefferson Davis	361
Some Fancy Riding	368
"The Bicycle Nuisance—Suppress It"	375
Newport	381
Bathing at Long Branch	384
The Pride of Saratoga	387

Long Beach	390
“You Have Deceived Me . . .”	399
The First Downward Step	402
“The Public Be D—d!”	405
Henry Bergh’s Dreadful Dream	408
The Drunkard’s Stomach	410
“Fashion”	411
“Nicking” the Tail	414
Sarony Victorious	421
The Lotus Club Arrives	424
The Modern Nero’s Human Torches	427
Mud on Langtry’s Skirts	433
“The Tidal Wave”	437
Health Preserver	441

OSCAR WILDE DISCOVERS AMERICA



# B O O K   O N E

## THE AESTHETES

### I

#### "A MOST INTENSE YOUNG MAN"

"LONDON, December 21: Oscar Wilde will be among the passengers when the *Arizona* sails from Liverpool on December 24th for New York."

Millionaires at Fifth Avenue breakfast tables, actors reading in their Albemarle Hotel beds, passengers warming their feet in loose straw on Brooklyn street cars, laughed as they read it in the *New York Tribune* on the morning of the twenty-third of December, 1881.

Farm wives trimming Christmas trees in Ohio houses, women hanging Christmas bouquets on New Orleans balconies, miners taking Yule-tide nips in California shanties, laughed as other people asked them, "Did you hear; Oscar Wilde's coming to America? The real Bunthorne's coming? The fellow the show was written about—the silly poet that eats flowers. Oscar Wilde!"

People laughed as they sang again that song they had lately learned:

A most intense young man,  
A soulful-eyed young man,  
An ultra poetical, super-aesthetical  
Out-of-the-way young man.

Other people laughed and sang:

I am *not* fond of uttering platitudes  
In stained-glass attitudes.  
In short my medievalism's affectation  
Is born of a morbid love of admiration.

Ever since September, when the opera *Patience* had struck New York, the name Oscar Wilde had been something to laugh at. The tunes and verses of *Patience* had spread, mouth to mouth, across the country.

Opera companies had sprung up right and left to perform the new play. Its words, its songs, its jokes, were in the air. And now the man it burlesqued was going to appear in person. It would be funny to see the fellow who had coined those silly phrases which you heard on all sides—"too too," and "too utterly utter," and "too preciously sublime," and "consummate"—the man who had made the sunflower famous, telling women to use it in designs for dresses and dadoes. He was supposed to have started the craze for "aestheticism," for bric-a-brac on whatnots, old china on mantels, colored glass in doors and windows. He had written some poems that went pretty far.

He was Lily Langtry's calf-lover.

He was Postlethwaite in Du Maurier's cartoons for *Punch*, either Postlethwaite or Maudle; small difference, for both characters were gushing, simpering, long-haired aesthetes who were said to eat flowers as well as to adore them.

Who was bringing Oscar over—Barnum?

No, not Barnum, but a showman almost as good, Richard D'Oyly Carte.

2

The London producer and stage manager, D'Oyly Carte, had in 1875 formed an operetta team of William Gilbert, a satirical jingler, and Arthur Sullivan, a composer of tunes. And for him, that year, they had done a short thing, *Trial by Jury*, then in 1877 a full-length comic opera, *The Sorcerer*, and in 1878, *Pinafore*, a lampoon on the British navy which had set England guffawing. The laughter had been heard across the Atlantic, and soon stolen versions of *Pinafore* were making America guffaw too. Boston had staged the operetta six months after it had its London début. Soon it was being given by as many as a hundred companies at one time.

D'Oyly Carte had crossed the ocean to see about it. When he stepped off the gangplank on July 2, 1879, he had heard everybody singing songs from the score, "And so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts," and "I'm called Little Buttercup." He heard, even more than in England, people quoting the chief jest of *Pinafore*—"What, *never*? Well, *hardly* ever." He heard that these bywords were so common that an American editor had recently summoned a subeditor to say, "This 'hardly ever' business was used twenty times in yesterday's edition. Never let me see it again."

The subeditor had cowered, as he asked, "What, *never*?"

And the editor, before his helpless tongue could catch itself, had answered, "Well, *hardly* ever."

D’Oyly Carte fussed and fumed with his lawyers as he saw all manner of theatrical companies, professional, amateur, church societies, even playful Negroes, producing *Pinafore* in strangely garbled versions. American managers had bribed Carte’s musicians, taken stenographic



#### NINCOMPOPIANA.—THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY.

*Our Gallant Colonial* (who is not a Member thereof, to Mrs. Cimabue Brown, who is), “AND WHO’S THIS YOUNG HERO THEY’RE ALL SWARMING OVER NOW!”

*Mrs. Cimabue Brown*. “JELLYFY POSTLETHWAITE, THE GREAT POET, YOU KNOW, WHO SAT FOR MAUDLE’S ‘DEAD NARCISSUS’! HE HAS JUST DEDICATED HIS LATTER-DAY SAPPHICS TO ME. *IS NOT HE BEAUTIFUL?*”

*Our Gallant Colonial*. “WHY, WHAT’S THERE BEAUTIFUL ABOUT HIM?”

*Mrs. Cimabue Brown*. “OH, LOOK AT HIS GRAND HEAD AND PORTLY FACE, WITH THOSE FLOWERLIKE EYES, AND THAT EXQUISITE SMILE! LOOK AT HIS SLENDER WILLOWY FRAME, AS YIELDING AND FRAGILE AS A WOMAN’S! THAT’S YOUNG MAUDLE, STANDING JUST BEHIND HIM—THE GREAT PAINTER, YOU KNOW. HE HAS JUST PAINTED ME AS ‘HELOISE,’ AND MY HUSBAND AS ‘ABELARD.’ *IS NOT HE DIVINE?*”

*N.B.—Postlethwaite and Maudle are quite unknown to *gent.**

[*The Colonial looks at*]

#### NINCOMPOPIANA

*The cartoon with which Du Maurier, in the February 4, 1880, issue of “Punch,” introduced the characters, Postlethwaite and Maudle, into his series of lampoons upon the London Aesthetes. He shows them, Postlethwaite in the lead, entering the salon of Mrs. Cimabue Brown, the aesthetic hostess.*

notes during the London performances, memorized parts of the action, in their effort to steal the play.

There was no international copyright to protect Carte, just as there was none to protect an American author from British piracy.

So D’Oyly Carte had hurried back to England and had laid an anti-pirate campaign. Gilbert and Sullivan had another opera almost ready for production, *The Pirates of Penzance*. Carte would open it simultaneously in both America and London, and thus get the jump on the

thieves. He would also send to New York an official production of *Pinafore* to show how much better the original and authorized version could be.

Gilbert and Sullivan had gone to America, arriving on the *Bothnia* November 5, 1879, and opening *Pinafore* at the Fifth Avenue Theater on December 1st, and *The Pirates of Penzance* at the same theater on December 30th. New York liked the music of *Pinafore* much better with the official orchestrations, and it took the new *Pirates* to its heart.

But the thieving still went on, checked somewhat in the case of *The Pirates* by threats of prosecution, but still willing to risk that in the far-off West.

Gilbert and Sullivan had gone home to give *The Pirates* its London première, for its English launching had been a perfunctory one on December 30th at an obscure theater out of town, for copyright purposes. While *Pinafore* ran on at Carte's Opéra Comique Theater, they prepared *The Pirates*, and when at last *Pinafore* reached seven hundred performances it stepped aside for the new opera. On April 4, 1880, the morning after the London début of *The Pirates*, Carte knew that he had another triumph, and set Gilbert and Sullivan planning still another.

That summer the authors wrestled with ideas. Gilbert had a notion of lampooning two clergymen who rivaled each other in mildness. But his feet had grown cold as he thought of offending the church. Then one night in bed a great idea came to him. He would make his clergymen poets. England had been laughing at poets and artists—a sensational cult, the Aesthetes—for almost four years, and lately the laughter had grown louder, for a leader had developed among the silly dreamers and poseurs, a young Irishman named Oscar Wilde. *Punch*, the comic weekly, had been satirizing him and all that he represented with uproarious success. "Aestheticism," the vague gospel of the cultists, was the rage, the vogue, of changeable, fashionable sets, and the mirth of the stolid shopkeepers and their wives.

The Aesthetes' pleas for subdued colors to replace the bright, bold ones of the bluff English styles had, by the midsummer of 1880, cast "a pewtry gray" hue over gowns and drawing-rooms. The affectations of the youths who grouped around Oscar Wilde and the American-born painter, James McNeill Whistler, provided excellent material for Gilbert and Sullivan, and by November they had a new opera ready, *Patience; or Bunthorne's Bride*. But they waited, because *The Pirates* was still crowding the Opéra Comique.

The delay was bothersome, for F. C. Burnand, editor of *Punch*, on February 2, 1881, produced *The Colonel*, a non-musical satire on the

Aesthetes, with one or two characters that could be recognized as having certain traits of Oscar Wilde.

At length Carte ended *The Pirates'* run after three hundred and sixty-three performances and, on April 23, 1881, revealed *Patience* in his Opéra Comique. François Cellier, one of the musical directors, had no doubts about the chief comic character, Reginald Bunthorne, the Fleshly Poet, being a burlesque of Oscar Wilde. Cellier knew how hard everybody had worked to make George Grossmith, Jr., who was short and fat, as “floppy” as the tall, languid Oscar Wilde. Walter Hamilton, a writer who was studying the Aesthetes with a view to writing a book about them, thought Archibald Grosvenor, the second most important rôle, resembled Wilde; Mrs. Edward Langtry, the reigning beauty of London, thought Bunthorne was Whistler in burlesque. Most onlookers, however, agreed with Cellier; and Wilde and Bunthorne became, to the street urchins of London, one and the same.

*Patience* thrived. Carte knew that, barring accident, he was at the apex of a producing triangle that could go on indefinitely. He built a new theater, the Savoy, to house Gilbert and Sullivan opera, illuminated it with the new invention, electric bulbs, the first public building so to be equipped, and moved *Patience* to it on October 10th. The play took on new life.

More than ever, now that the future was secure, Carte's eyes turned toward that second greatest of his markets, America. Earlier in the summer he had sent an extraordinary business manager, a young woman named Helen Lenoir, to open The Carte Bureau on Broadway, hard by the Standard Theater, where the pirated version of *Pinafore* had been successful. Miss Lenoir had helped stage *The Pirates* in London and held Carte's complete confidence.

To her he sent British lecturers, the chief being Archibald Forbes, who had won fame on the Continent as a London war correspondent. She was also expected to lay the groundwork for production, in New York, of *Patience*, due in September '81, and of *Youth*, a costly melodrama, scheduled for February, 1882.

How to fight the pirates who were beginning to turn greedy eyes on *Patience* was a problem. Carte could not send Gilbert and Sullivan to New York as he had done before. They were working fiercely on a new opera, *Iolanthe*, which was due to open at the Savoy in November.

The next best thing would be to get Oscar Wilde to show himself in America under the D'Oyly Carte banner, have him lecture on the very subject *Patience* satirized, and lecture, too, at the same time *Patience* was being given in New York. This would not only draw to American notice the authenticity of the Carte version, and confound the pirates;

it would popularize D'Oyly Carte's name as a theatrical institution.

The cunning eye of the showman was focused on Oscar Wilde. Would the curious youth agree to make a spectacle of himself, to become "an advance poster" for a play that burlesqued him?

## 3

Oscar Wilde had been born on October 16, 1854, in Dublin, the son of Sir William Wilde, an Irish oculist remarkable for professional skill and personal untidiness, and of Lady Jane Algee Wilde, an aristocratic, gushing, ultra-romantic authoress, who was known to champions of Irish liberty as "Speranza," writer of poems and articles befriending their cause. She had already borne a son, Willy, when Oscar had come into the world, and she had expressed disappointment that this second one was not a girl. Nevertheless she had been proud of him and had loaded him with so many great family names that he had been christened Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wilde. "He is wonderful; he can do anything," she was soon saying in her ecstatic way.

Educated at a fashionable school, Portora, at Inniskillen, Oscar had been a dreamy, retiring boy in all things save his studies. As a student he was clever, and at seventeen was moved up to Trinity College in Dublin, where he refused to play cricket with the other boys because, as he said, "the attitudes assumed were so indecent."

Memories of these Trinity days came to a Britisher, Horace Wilkins, in Salt Lake City, Utah, when, in 1882, he read of Oscar's prominence. Wilkins told listeners:

"Wilde was a queer, awkward lad"—a lad "who hardly ever made a step he didn't knock something over. He was big, ungainly and clumsy to such a degree that it made him a laughing stock. But those who made fun of Wilde did not know him. He was a big-hearted, liberal fellow, who never did a mean, underhanded thing, and his last shilling was at anybody's disposal."

Wilkins remembered Oscar as a backward boy, "ever moping and dreaming," and as he talked, Wilkins made a sweeping statement:

"One day a thing happened which seemed, as it were, to change the current of Wilde's life. He wrote a poem which he read at one of the class symposiums. It struck me as a beautiful thing, but when he had finished reading, the bully of the class laughed sneeringly. I never saw a man's face light up with such savagery of hate as Wilde's. He strode across the room and, standing in front of the man, asked him by what right he sneered at his poetry. The man laughed again and Wilde slapped him across the face.

“The class interfered, but inside of an hour the crowd was out behind the college arranging for a fight.

“Wilde, in a towering rage, was ready to fight with howitzers if necessary, but the bully wanted to fight with nature’s weapons. No one supposed that Wilde had a ghost of a show, but when he led out with



A LOVE-AGONY. DESIGN BY MAUDLE.

### A LOVE-AGONY

*Du Maurier's hit at either Wilde or Swinburne, or both. “Punch,” June 5, 1880.*

his right it was like a pile-driver. He followed the surprised bully up with half a dozen crushers and that ended it.

“Talk about that man being a ‘pallid young man’; when I see these allusions in the newspapers I always think of his fighting qualities. I think he would make an ox shake his head and blink.

“Well, after that, Wilde’s stock was high at Trinity. It seemed to put new ambition into him and the next term found him at the head of all his classes. He seemed to be able to master everything he tackled.”

Practically no one in America knew that Wilde had won the gold medal for Greek in his third year at Trinity, or a classical scholarship that had made his entrance easier into Oxford, or that he had been one of Oxford’s most brilliant students, winning the Newdigate prize in 1878 with his poem “Ravenna.” While still a student he had said a

thing that had come down to London, and, a little later, across to America. With kindred souls among the new cult of Oxford Aesthetes, he had lolled in his rooms, which he had decorated with etchings of wan, slumbrous nude women, and long rows of china teacups. And to the collegians who received his unbounded hospitality he had once sighed, "Oh, that I might live up to my blue china!"

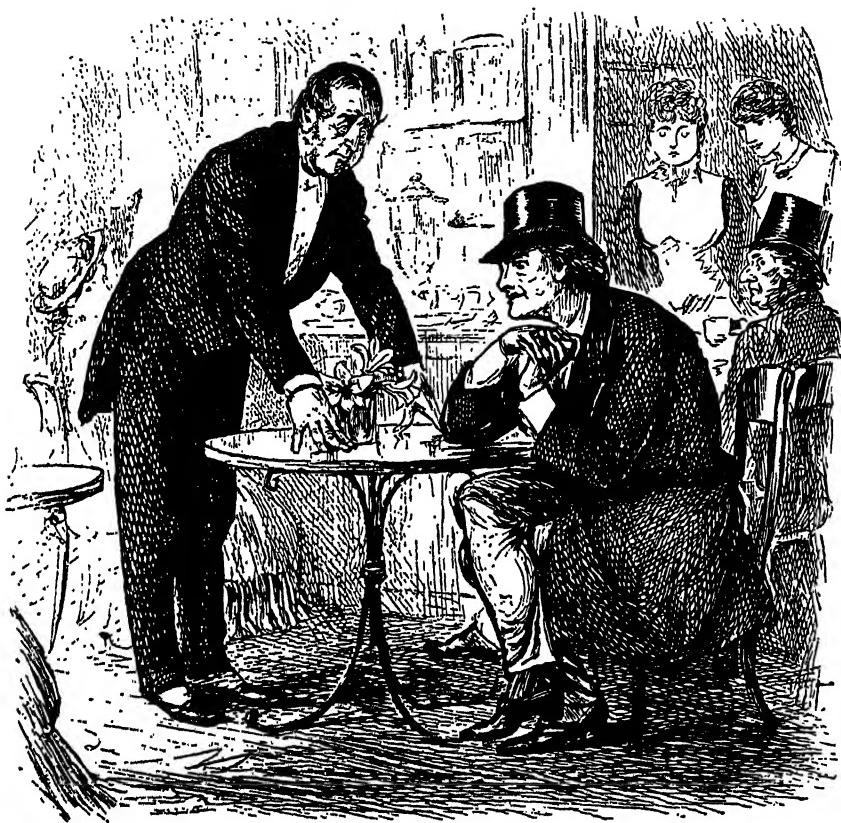
Although the more stalwart youths of Magdalen College in Oxford had been laughing at him even before he graduated, and had indeed once wrecked his aesthetic rooms, they also, like Horace Wilkins in Trinity, knew him as somewhat sturdier than his china reputation indicated. One day, after the fashion of the time, upperclassmen decided to "rag" Wilde, and, binding his hands, dragged his heavy body up a long hill, skinning and bruising him severely in the process. At the summit they saw him "flick off the dust," look calmly about, then say, "Yes, the view from this hill is really very charming."

What few people in 1882 realized was that Oscar Wilde remembered so much of what John Ruskin had taught him at Oxford about economics. Angered by what the rise of machinery and factory work was doing to the handicraft arts and to the souls and lives of workingmen, Ruskin had denounced the modern age of industrial and political economy, and had propounded ideas of a Utopia in which coöperative and socialistic systems should rule. He had taught at The Workingman's College and had advocated public museums where toilers could study the arts and sciences.

That Wilde was using Ruskin's criticisms on art as the basis for his own witticisms and epigrams had been apparent to a few Englishmen in 1878 and 1879, when the youth, after a student's trip to Greece, had begun to fight his way up from comparative poverty to a place in London's world of art and society. Living on his small income, pieced out by the few poems and prose articles he could sell in his Grub Street existence, Wilde decided that the quick road to luxury lay in getting himself noticed. "He stepped boldly into the limelight," observed a friend, Frank Harris, "going to all first nights and taking the floor on all occasions."

More and more persons of consequence had begun to notice that this Oxford graduate talked amusingly, and that when his admiration for people and ideas was stirred, it became incandescent.

Talk of the nobility of toil, and of the evils of the British factory system, had not been profitable in London society as it had been in Oxford, and Wilde had become known as a dilettante, a connoisseur of the arts, a critic of painting and literature, and a worshiper of beauty in woman.



### AN AESTHETIC MIDDAY MEAL.

*At the Lunch-on hour, Jellaby Postlethwaite enters a Pastrycook's and calls for a glass of Water, into which he puts a freshly-cut Lily, and loses himself in contemplation thereof.*  
Waller. "SHALL I BRING YOU ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?"  
Jellaby Postlethwaite. "THANKS, NO! I HAVE ALL I REQUIRE, AND SHALL SOON HAVE DONE!"

### WILDE'S LOVE OF FLOWERS

*Du Maurier's cartoon which ridiculed Oscar Wilde more directly than had his earlier pictures about Aesthetes. "Punch," July 17, 1880.*

Oscar Wilde had made his mark in the world of London by praising England's reigning beauty, Mrs. Edward Langtry. She, a fair-skinned and superbly profiled girl from the Island of Jersey, was the rage of London. The Prince of Wales was her friend, and the aged Premier, Gladstone, too. She entered drawing-rooms so majestically that once Queen Victoria herself had stood up to see her do it.

In 1852 Mrs. Langtry had been born Emilie Charlotte Le Breton, the daughter of the Island's dean, who had social rating despite his lack of wealth. Luck had come to her by way of the sea. A Belfast widower, twice her age, Edward Langtry, had met her while cruising down the coast, married her in 1874, and settled down to enjoy an income from his lands in Ireland. Then Sir Allen Young, the Arctic explorer, discovered her while yachting, and took her to meet his friend, the Prince of Wales. Sir Allen, it was often said, had failed to discover the North Pole, but he had discovered something more lovely to look upon. The Prince had been charmed, he had praised Mrs. Langtry extravagantly, and soon her husband had gone with her to live in London, where the recommendation of royalty made her the toast of the town.

Crowds would stop, stare at her, follow her when she walked in the parks; whatever she wore was quickly the latest mode for London—then for England. One morning she twisted a piece of black velvet into a toque, stuck a quill through it, and went out. Two days later every milliner in London, it seemed, had "The Langtry hat" in his window. "Langtry shoes" became a standard style in the trade.

From "Lillie" her name soon changed to "Lily," for John Millais, the painter, did her portrait and titled it "The Jersey Lily," and as such she was soon famous on both sides of the Atlantic.

Painters, poets, authors, had made her almost a goddess in their studios by the time young Wilde had joined her court in 1878. J. E. C. Bodley, who had known Wilde in college, went to a London theater with him one evening, and as they emerged, heard his friend say he must hurry away. He was going "to meet the loveliest woman in Europe at Frank Miles' studio."

Lily saw in Oscar "a face so large and colorless that a few pale freckles of good size were oddly conspicuous." She saw "a well-shaped mouth with somewhat coarse lips and greenish-hued teeth. The plainness of his face, however, was redeemed by the splendor of his great, eager eyes. . . . He was large, about six feet, and broad in proportion, grotesque in manner, but had a remarkably fascinating and compelling

personality, and what in an actor would be termed wonderful ‘stage presence,’ ” also “one of the most alluring voices I ever heard, round and soft and full of variety.”

That young Oscar, at twenty-five, was rapturously in love with twenty-seven-year-old Lily Langtry was soon apparent to London. Arthur Ransome heard that Oscar’s love was unreturned; he was only delightful to her, not a conqueror; and that he had once written her, “Ah, hadst thou liked me less and loved me more.” Wilde once told his friend, Robert H. Sherard, that it was not true that he had loved Sarah Bernhardt, because at the time the rumors were flying, he was hopelessly in love with another woman; in other words, The Jersey Lily.

Sarah Bernhardt had come to London on her first dramatic invasion in late May, 1879, while Wilde’s rapturous devotion to Mrs. Langtry was a matter for general talk and mirth across the city. The French actress had landed at Folkestone to find a great crowd cheering and throwing flowers.

One voice struck her ear with particular charm.

“Vive Sarah Bernhardt!” it was saying.

She looked up and saw a pale young man with “the ideal face of Hamlet.” He gave her a gardenia. He was a promising actor, Forbes-Robertson.

She heard someone else cry, “They’ll make you a carpet of flowers soon.”

“Here is one,” exclaimed another young man, throwing an armful of lilies at her feet.

She turned and looked at him, seeing “luminous eyes and long hair.” It was Oscar Wilde.

A month later *Time*, a periodical edited by Edmund Yates, who befriended Wilde, appeared with Oscar’s poem “The New Helen,” addressed openly to Lily Langtry and hailing her in passionate terms as like that Trojan beauty of beauties—

Lily of Love, pure and inviolate,  
Tower of Ivory, red rose of fire.

While writing the poem, Wilde haunted her home as much as he dared, walked for hours in the street outside her door, and once curled up on the doorstep to go so soundly asleep that he never knew when Mr. Langtry, coming home, stumbled over his body.

Lily Langtry saw evolve what she called “The Oscar Wilde Myth,” a thing that had, in part, arisen from the poet’s practice “of always bringing me flowers.” Since he had not been “in circumstances to afford great posies, he would drop into Covent Garden flower market, buy me



THE SIX-MARK TEA-POT.

*Aesthetic Bridegroom.* "IT IS QUITE CONSUMMATE, IS IT NOT?"  
*Intense Bride.* "IT IS, INDEED! OH, ALGERNON, LET US LIVE UP TO IT!"

"LET US LIVE UP TO IT"

*For this cartoon, published in "Punch," October 3, 1880, Du Maurier  
reprinted Oscar Wilde's college jest about "living up to his china."*

a single gorgeous amaryllis and stroll down Piccadilly carrying the flower. The scribblers construed his act of homage as a pose, and thus I innocently conferred on him the title, ‘Apostle of the Lily.’ ”

So famous did Wilde’s lily become that a lady, greeting him at a reception, called his attention to its absence, and asked him where it was.

“At home, madam,” he replied, “with your manners.”

In a poem published in the *London World*, during 1879, Oscar had been recognized as one of the courtiers closest to the throne of beauty:

When youth and wit and beauty call  
I never walk away.  
When Mrs. Langtry leaves the hall  
I never care to stay.  
  
I cannot rhyme with Oscar Wilde,  
Or Hayward (gifted pair!)  
Or sing how Mrs. Langtry smiled  
Or how she wore her hair.  
  
And yet I want to play my part  
Like any other swain,  
To fracture Mrs. Langtry’s heart  
And patch it up again.

## 5

Upon other notables, too, young Wilde had turned the heat of his eloquent admiration: Ellen Terry, Modjeska, Henry Irving, and Whistler. In company with other poets and artists who spoke fervently about an “English Renaissance” which Aesthetes were bringing about, he raved over “the intensity” of *Romeo and Juliet* as performed by Irving and Terry, and in club rooms it was told that Oscar had said, in one transport, “Irving’s legs are limpid and utter. Both are delicately intellectual, but his left leg is a poem.” Some Londoners thought Wilde was serious when he said this, others thought he was joking. People who saw and heard him in Whistler’s studio were sure he had been joking, for the two men exchanged swift banter that revealed each to be ready to sacrifice the other, themselves, anyone, for the sake of an epigram.

In Whistler’s studio Wilde sat admiring the American’s color schemes, imbibing his ideas of interior decoration, copying his style of epigrammatic conversation. Forbes-Robertson saw the newspapers

publish an item that "Whistler and Oscar Wilde were seen on the Brighton front talking as usual about themselves," and learned that Whistler had clipped out the item and sent it to Wilde with a note that said, "I wish these reporters would be accurate; if you remember, Oscar, we were talking about me."

Oscar had wired his answer: "It is true, Jimmie, we were talking about you, but I was thinking about myself."

When Whistler painted a picture called "The Peacock Room," Wilde had decorated his own chambers with peacock feathers, and from the American he had drawn redoubled enthusiasm for blue china.

In time Whistler, who was a supreme egotist, came to believe Wilde's ideas of art were not original, and in criticism wrote for the newspapers:

"What has Oscar in common with art except that he dines at our tables and picks from our platters the plums for the pudding he peddles? Oscar, the amiable, irresponsible, esurient Oscar, with no more sense of a picture than of the fit of a coat, has the courage of the opinions of others."

Wilde answered, "With our James, vulgarity begins at home; would that it might stay there." And Whistler promptly replied, "A poor thing, Oscar, but for once, I suppose your own."

Their battle as to which was plagiarizing the other was permanently settled in Whistler's favor when on hearing Oscar compliment him on an epigram and sigh, "I wish I had said that," the American snapped, "You will, Oscar, you will."

It had been Whistler and other "rebel" painters of London who had caused Ruskin ideas and, more powerfully, the artistic theories of Oxford undergraduate groups, to grow in Wilde and to bring him to the point of putting on lavish affectations of speech and dress. Whistler was extravagantly original in his own attire and mannerisms, and some observers guessed that Wilde might have been attempting to outdo him. Mrs. Langtry thought Oscar's affectations purely for use in public—"to his friends he was always the same." Christine Nilsson, the opera singer, described how, on meeting him, "He commenced to talk his nonsense and pose to me as we were going into the dining-room. I said, 'Look here, Mr. Wilde, Madame Christine Nilsson will put up with no such stuff!'"

"Mr. Wilde said, 'Thank you. You are the first sensible woman and true friend that I have met.' After that he acted as a man should, and talked sensibly."



OSCAR WILDE IN NEW YORK

*Photographed by Sarony.*



## 2

## “ADVANCE POSTER FOR PATIENCE”

IT was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an art movement to which both Ruskin and Whistler contributed without precisely belonging to it, which had prepared Oscar Wilde for London, and London for Oscar Wilde. From its agitations had come the word “aesthete,” which Wilde would soon find applied to himself more than to older and more famous practitioners of the arts.

The word from which aesthetics derived had, in Greek, meant “perception by the senses,” and aesthetics had come to mean the science of the beautiful. A German, Baumgarten, had published his philosophic *Aesthetica* in 1750 and had seen it alter the thoughts and modes of those Teutons who sought higher things. In 1848 four students in the London Royal Academy, Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Thomas Woolner, had organized a revolt against what they considered to be narrow dogmas in painting, literature, and sculpture. “Back to Nature,” was their battle cry, back beyond the Renaissance which was so full of “sensuality and shallow pride.” Their magazine, *The Germ*, had been damned by orthodox Britons as unwholesome, and their verse had been labeled “The Fleshly School of Poetry.”

Gathering disciples, the young Aesthetes had adopted a name, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as expressing their return to the simplicity of Italian painters before the day of Raphael. Botticelli was their god, and soon their paintings, hanging in an independent gallery, The Grosvenor, began to reveal women frankly patterned after the long, mystic creatures of Botticelli’s canvases—“pale, distraught beauties, auburn of hair, thin of cheek, flat of breast, long of neck, thin and nervous of hands, and with love-hungry eyes,” females wounded by the beauty of the world, and sick with passion. From the pens of the Brotherhood had come poems creating the same effects.

John Ruskin, rushing to defend the Aesthetes from the scorn of the conventional painters and writers, had given them a phrase, “blessed and precious,” which they not only multiplied when speaking of art, but used as inspiration for other expressions of intensity.

The poet Keats, who had been admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, became the most adored of all British poets as the younger aesthetes of Oscar Wilde's generation joined the movement. Through the writings of the reformers throbbed pleas for art for art's sake and scorn for Victorian England's dress, homes, architecture, paintings, sculpture, literature. The stiffness of hats, the hideousness of the industrial age, the horrors of machine-made articles, were anathema to them. They cried for sensitivity, unrestrained emotions, new uses of subdued colors, and freer flow of natural instincts.

They championed the music of Liszt, Rubinstein, and Wagner as "intense"; they denounced the stiff angularity of Eastlake furniture which had become, since the early 1870's, so popular in British and American homes. They cried for a return to the Queen Anne styles, for Chippendales, for dadoes, for wrought-iron work, stained glass, old china, bric-a-brac, everything that was "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace and intensity." Soft draperies must replace heavy curtains, design must decorate commonplace articles. To the Japanese they turned with fervor.

So far as people of fashion were concerned, the aesthetic movement had triumphed before Oscar Wilde had joined it. Society matrons, in numbers, had adopted much of the program before their more conservative husbands realized the Aesthetes were anything but silly fools. The general public, however, had not yet understood what the change meant. It seemed only one of those unaccountable and fleeting fads that were always agitating the upper crust.

Law suits had served to make the word "aesthete" more descriptive of the movement than "Pre-Raphaelite," for in 1876, Robert Buchanan, art critic, who had commenced ridiculing the reformers five years earlier, published so bitter an attack upon Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose poetry had made him "King of the Aesthetes," that the latter sued him, and the newspapers fixed the term, at least in the minds of the masses. Later, when Whistler engaged in a great public quarrel with Ruskin, he gave the Aesthetes still wider publicity.

By 1877 aestheticism was so well known in England that George Du Maurier, the most popular of the staff artists on *Punch*, the weekly humorous delight of middle-class England, was deriding the effects of the cult upon family life, upon the manners and customs of young people.

Dreamy youths, in knee breeches and with soulful eyes fastened



#### AN AESTHETIC AFFECTION

*Postlethwaite's reply, as given in this Du Maurier cartoon, was later quoted in American newspapers as an actual statement by Oscar Wilde. "Punch," January 15, 1881.*

upon books of poetry, had appeared in Du Maurier drawings as early as 1877, while Oscar Wilde was still in Oxford. "Vapid vegetable loves" had been a phrase under a Du Maurier drawing in March, 1878, before Wilde graduated from the university or descended upon London. The love of poets and artists for flowers as designs for art decoration had begun in the paintings of Millais and Poynter, long before Wilde joined the aesthetic group, and lilies were being ridiculed as an accepted badge of the cult in September, 1878, months before Wilde carried them to Lily Langtry.

"Nincompoopiana," a series of drawings satirizing the aesthetic geniuses and poseurs, had been a Du Maurier series in the summer of 1879, and London had laughed hard and loud at the long-haired idlers, languidly drooling of "cultah," flowers, china, beauty, and "intensity."

It was not until February 4, 1880, that Du Maurier recognized Oscar Wilde as a leader in the new cult. In that issue of *Punch* he introduced two characters, Maudle, the painter, and Postlethwaite, the poet, into the home of Mrs. Cimabue Brown, a Pre-Raphaelite lady of gushing vocabulary. Which of the two characters was intended to be Wilde and which Whistler, or for that matter Swinburne, was indefinite, but London thought of Wilde in particular. Either Oscar or Swinburne, it was said, might fit into the ridiculous drawing which Du Maurier published on June 5th, a picture of a womanish creature in Grecian costume swooning in a lily bed beside a brook, and entitled "Love Agony."

Readers were, however, sure that Du Maurier meant Wilde in the cartoon on July 17th, which portrayed, under the heading "An Aesthetic Midday Meal," long-locked Jellaby Postlethwaite telling a café waiter that he wanted no food, just a glass of water for the lily at which he stared. "I have all I require," he was saying, "and shall soon have done." And Wilde's epigram about living up to his china was coolly appropriated by Du Maurier for the issue of October 30th, although it was linked with a caricature of Swinburne. A limpid bridegroom was saying to his intense bride as they studied a tea pot, "It is quite consummate, isn't it?" and she was answering, "It is indeed. Oh, Algernon, let's live up to it."

The Aesthetes' passion for flowers was satirized on Christmas Day when *Punch* exhibited a fainting poet helped by a St. Bernard dog, while the text recited the hero's Alpine search for "The Utter Blossom, the Perfect Thing, the Fleur des Alpes." The poet was saying he had been inspired to this excelsior feat by Jellaby Postlethwaite's recent coup in sitting up all night with a lily, and by Jellaby's boast, "I have imitators. . . . Pilcox declared he would sit up all night with a Stepha-

nolis. . . . Milkington Sopley swore he never went to bed without an Aloe Blossom. Next season I took Maudle aside and whispered to him that I had sat up all night with a Primrose. I thought it a capital change after the lily.”

The most famous of the drawings which, one by one as they appeared, were appropriated by American illustrated newspapers, notably the *New York Daily Graphic*, was that which *Punch* published on January 15, 1881, presenting Grigsby, a Philistine, inviting Postlethwaite to a party at the seaside.

“Thanks, no,” Jellaby was sighing. “I never bathe. I always see myself so dreadfully foreshortened in the water, you know.”

It was in the issue of March 26, 1881, that Du Maurier fastened the expression “too too” upon the Aesthetes—an expression which quickly flew across the English-speaking world. And in June, another *Punch* artist added Wilde by name and caricature to the magazine’s series of “Fancy Portraits.” Number 37 was Oscar’s head peering from the heart of a sunflower, while below it a verse read:

Aesthete of Aesthetes,  
What’s in a name,  
The poet is Wilde,  
But his poetry’s tame.

Oscar’s book of poems had just been published, containing one, “Charmides,” which America would soon be regarding as anything but tame. *Punch* had declared these poems to be “Swinburne and Water” when the publisher, David Bogue, issued them at Oscar’s expense, with a ten per cent commission for Bogue on sales. The little volume, selling at ten shillings six pence, was running into four editions, despite adverse reviews. Sarah Bernhardt helped, and so did Ellen Terry, for each had been the subject of rhapsodic sonnets in the book, and each responded with diligent praise.

As *Patience* stormed through the summer of 1881, heightening London’s derision of the Aesthetes, Oscar Wilde became more and more identified with the Bunthorne who nestled his cheek in his palm and drew his languid legs, in their knee breeches, one after the other across the stage as he sang:

Though the Philistines may jostle,  
You will rank as an apostle  
In the high aesthetic band,  
If you walk down Piccadilly  
With a poppy or a lily

In your medieval hand.  
 And everyone will say,  
 As you walk your flowery way,  
 "If he's content with a vegetable love  
 Which would certainly not suit me,  
 Why, what a most particularly pure young man  
 This pure young man must be."

## 3

The exact maneuvers by which D'Oyly Carte induced Oscar Wilde to become "an advance poster" for the opera which made a fool of him, the precise arts of the showman that Carte employed, remained locked in the secret recesses of that promoter's heart.

With Helen Lenoir paving the way, Carte was ready to open his New York production of *Patience* in September. He had added Colonel W. F. Morse to his New York bureau, and was anticipating a great season. Yet he was not wholly convinced that America was prepared for a satire on aestheticism. He did not realize how much about the faddists had been published in America, and how far their ideas had permeated the fashionable world. His managers had not told him, it was surmised, how many books and magazine articles had been printed on aesthetic schemes of interior decoration, nor how Du Maurier's cartoons had been reprinted in American illustrated newspapers.

An American, unnamed in the accounts, told Wilde, a little later, that in New York "Helen Lenoir asked me how the American public could be brought to understand the aesthetic craze, and I suggested that you should be hired to give a course of lectures over here in the costume of an aesthete, with a sunflower in your buttonhole and a poppy or a lily in your medieval hand. She cabled that evening to D'Oyly Carte."

Colonel W. F. Morse gave it out that something like public demand had prompted the idea of Wilde's trip. In the conventional manner of showmen, Morse said that "the success of *Patience*" in New York indicated that "the public would still be further interested in the personality of the man who was said to be the leading light on the new gospel of art." He declared that "in September, 1881, a lady, well known in English and American newspaper circles as a writer upon current society topics, suggested that perhaps Mr. Wilde would consent to give a series of lectures in this country."

The mysterious lady, if there were such a person, had moved rapidly indeed that September, for Morse had opened *Patience* as late as the



### MAUDLE ON THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

Maudle. "How consummately lovely your son is, Mrs. Brown!"

Mrs. Brown (a Philistine from the country). "WHAT? He's a nice, manly boy, if you mean that, Mr. Maudle. He has just left school, you know, and wishes to be an artist."

Maudle. "Why should he be an artist?"

Mrs. Brown. "Well, he must be something!"

Maudle. "Why should he be anything? Why not let him remain for ever content to exist beautifully?"

(Mrs. Brown determines that at all events her son shall not study Art under Maudle.)

### CAREER

In this cartoon Du Maurier gave Maudle, the aesthetic painter, a close resemblance to Oscar Wilde. "Punch," February 12, 1881.

twenty-second of the month. It was surmised that Morse meant Mrs. Frank Leslie, who knew Lady Wilde, and who later on married Oscar's brother, Willy. As editor of the *Illustrated Newspaper*, which she had inherited from her husband the year before, Mrs. Leslie fitted Morse's description, yet when, in time to come, she had a chance to claim credit for the importation of Wilde, she said, "My friendship with Oscar Wilde began when he came to see me on his arrival in New York. He brought letters of introduction to me."

Morse declared that, after the "well-known lady" had made the suggestion, "at once a cable was sent: *Oscar Wilde, 1 Ovington Square, London: Responsible agent asks me to inquire if you will consider offer he makes by letter for fifty readings beginning November first. This is confidential. Answer.*"

Wilde answered from Tite Street, Chelsea, where he roomed with Frank Miles, "Yes, if offer good."

Frank Harris had it that Oscar's brother, Willy, had first given the project publicity. Willy, serving on the staff of the *London World*, had been able to publish a paragraph pretending that the United States was clamoring to have a look at the new poet. Willy's interest, other observers thought, might have been aroused by his knowledge that Oscar needed money for himself and for his mother, with whom Willy, incidentally, resided.

As the autumn progressed D'Oyly Carte's need of Wilde grew more acute, for while the success of his own *Patience* company in New York showed America to need no education in aestheticism, the pirates had helped themselves to the new opera more freely, if possible, than to *Pinafore*. For instance two outlaw companies had opened simultaneously and prosperously in Chicago in mid-October.

What, in the opinion of some onlookers, had helped prepare Wilde for so great a departure as platform work was the appearance that December of his idolized Lily Langtry upon the stage, and her almost immediate decision to play in America the following autumn. If a fellow-aristocrat could take so bold a step, the son of Sir William and Lady Wilde could take it too. Like Mrs. Langtry, he had been thinking of the stage, although as playwright, not actor. He had written a drama, *Vera; or, the Nihilists*, with which he hoped to capitalize on the public interest in Russian revolutionaries particularly after their assassination of the Czar Alexander II in March, 1881. London production had been set for December, with Mrs. Bernard Beers agreeing to play it, but, at the last minute, everything had been canceled. One explanation was that Mrs. Beers had backed out, another, given by Wilde a little later, was that it had been impossible to cast it properly, but the

*New York Tribune* on December 14th reported that “in view of England’s political feeling on the Nihilists just now” *Vera* had been “postponed.”

Certain it was that English diplomats had grown sensitive about Russian assassins, for the newly crowned Czarina was a sister of the Princess of Wales.

Oscar Wilde turned his eyes toward New York, where British plays, particularly D’Oyly Carte’s, did so well.

## 4

Mrs. Langtry had been for several years known to newspaper readers of America, and on June 28, 1881, they had seen in their journals a London dispatch which said: “The property of Mrs. Langtry has been sold at auction. She had an income of £1,200 a year, but demands of the social season were so great that she and her husband have been overwhelmed in debt. The report that Mrs. Langtry will appear on the stage to retrieve her fortune is renewed.”

As a girl Lily had liked private theatricals, and now she thought the stage the one avenue open to her for money and continued adoration. Her society friends objected, as did her aging and futile husband, but the Prince of Wales had come gallantly to the fore, saying, “At all events she will show the public what an English lady is on the stage.”

Mrs. Langtry had been only waiting for some friend to push her toward the footlights. It was Mrs. Labouchère who did that very thing.

The wife of Henry Labouchère, that scintillating editor of *Truth*, had, as an actress, been for years known as Henrietta Hodson. She had quarreled with W. S. Gilbert, charging him with criticisms of her acting so caustic as to prevent her from getting rôles, and with her husband’s backing she had leased theaters and been a force in them. Years before, as the daughter of musical comedy folk, she had started as a dancer in burlesque at Bristol, then had quit the stage to marry Richard Pigeon, a lawyer and widower of her home town. The marriage had been a wretched one, and she had gone to London to take up the stage once more.

Soon, as the London correspondent of the *New York Times* wrote, “Mrs. Pigeon’s name became associated with that of Mr. Labouchère, a rich banker and gentleman of distinguished family connections. . . . A formal agreement of separation was made with Mr. Pigeon, and she and Mr. Labouchère were married.” Thomas P. Fowler, New York lawyer for Labouchère and watch-dog of the Virginia lands which Labouchère had bought while a member of the British embassy in Washington

during the 1860's, revealed that "Mr. Pigeon's whereabouts had been unknown for years" and that his ex-wife and the London publisher were "lawfully wedded."

Although there was gossip about the Labouchères among persons on both sides of the Atlantic who did not know them, the Prince of Wales recognized them not only formally but warmly, and T. P. O'Connor reported that at their magnificent estate, Pope Villa in Twickenham, "every Sunday there gathered anybody who was anybody in London society." The editor's friends said that political enemies were to blame for the gossip, and pointed to the fact that during one of Labouchère's campaigns for Parliament the opposition had set off a flock of pigeons in the midst of one of his speeches. A witty and cultured writer and speaker, an aristocrat of French ancestry, Labouchère had made many enemies in England, and had espoused the extreme radical party, careless of what that might do to his society friends. They, however, had liked him too well to let politics interfere, for, under his outward pose of cynicism, the man was notable for warmth of heart and gifts of friendship.

Mrs. Labouchère, bright, stout, charming, had in the summer of 1881 brought to a head Lily Langtry's half-formed notions about the stage. T. P. O'Connor reported that "probably Mrs. Labouchère took up Mrs. Langtry thinking she might do something for herself, since Lily was a favorite of royalty and the aristocracy." Other reporters thought Mrs. Labouchère was simply kind of heart.

Be that as it may, the former Henrietta Hodson loved the stage, and it was under her wing and in her own Twickenham that Mrs. Langtry made her début in amateur theatricals. And although Lily felt her performance disappointing, her sponsor resolutely started her rehearsing for a professional début, marching her up and down the lawn until Labouchère, looking on with approval, said that a flock of sheep could not have ruined so much grass.

Reports of the step created a sensation in England—and in America, where the *New York Daily Graphic*, on December 12, reported, "Mrs. Langtry's Oscar Wilde was present at the début of the Jersey Lily on the amateur stage, wearing a kerchief of sunflower hue, thrust with cunning carelessness into his white waistcoat."

And to the *Graphic*, on December 9, a London correspondent wrote, "Mrs. Langtry, who has been stared at as no woman has ever been stared at before, is to test her ability in *She Stoops to Conquer* at the Haymarket Theater in London, December 16th."

The event came off with curiosity at fever heat. Mrs. Labouchère had arranged for part of the receipts to be given to charity, a maneuver

PUNCH'S FANCY PORTRAITS.—NO. 37.



"O. W."

"O, I feel just as happy as a bright Sunflower  
*Lays of Christy Minstrelsy*

Æsthete of Æsthetes!  
What's in a name?  
The poet is WILDE,  
But his poetry's tame.

PUNCH'S PORTRAIT OF "O.W."

"Punch," June 25, 1881, salutes the appearance of  
Oscar's Wilde's first book of poems.

which allowed many of the nobility to attend with good grace. And to the débüt came the Prince of Wales, with his wife at his side. The critics were restrained as to Mrs. Langtry's ability as an actress, but they exulted over her beauty—and she emerged with her mind made up—she was going ahead with it.

Within a few days Oscar Wilde had also decided to proceed with a public career. Carte was offering to pay all expenses and give the lecturer approximately one-third of the gross receipts.

## 5

Whatever were the deciding reasons in Oscar's mind, he at last accepted D'Oyly Carte's terms, and left London to catch the *Arizona* at Liverpool. "Nobody is sanguine about his success," wrote the London correspondent of the *New York Times*, "but nobody knows what he can do beyond writing poetry and posing as a leading figure in a limited circle."

The *London World*, edited by Oscar's friend, Edmund Yates, waved him farewell:

Better to be thought one whom most abuse  
For speech of donkey or for look of goose  
Than that the world should pass in silence by.  
Wherefore I wear a sunflower in my coat,  
Cover my shoulders with my flowing hair,  
Tie verdant satin 'round my open throat;  
Culture and love I cry, and ladies smile  
And seedy critics overflow with bile.

And as he departed, those Englishmen who had been saying that Wilde was not the leader of the Aesthetes, but only posing as such, were discomfited because Du Maurier, as if bereft of his model, dropped Postlethwaite and Maudle from *Punch*. Only once again that winter or spring did a drawing touch upon young Wilde—and it was not by Du Maurier. In the issue of March 11th was pictured a new Ossian, that bard of antiquity, floating in the ether near a lily-moon and bearing in his hand a scroll marked "Lecture."

In Wilde's luggage, as the *Arizona* left the harbor, were knee breeches of the kind worn by Bunthorne. How often Wilde had worn them in London was a matter of dispute. Lily Langtry said she had never seen them on him. Other friends said he had appeared in them at various times. Frank Harris, often imaginative, insisted Wilde told him he had worn them as far back as his Oxford days. Other friends said he

had never donned them in college. Du Maurier, avid as he was for ridiculous details for Maudle and Postlethwaite, had always drawn them in conventional, long, tight trousers. His only Aesthetes in knee breeches had been in cartoons prior to Wilde's arrival upon the London scene. Some scrutinizers of the young poet's career thought he was taking to America what he had occasionally worn in London, others thought he was adopting an eighteenth-century fad in an attempt to live up to Bunthorne.

Whether in trousers or breeches, he proved during the year 1882 that he wore upon his ample feet the traditional seven-league boots.



## B O O K T W O

### FIRST DISCOVERIES

# I

#### "NOTHING TO DECLARE BUT MY GENIUS"

THE steamship *Arizona* lay at quarantine, and, in company with the medical officers, there came clambering aboard reporters from all the morning newspapers of New York. They were well chilled, for it was late in the evening of this day, January 2nd, and the water had been rough, as the tug brought them to the ship's side.

The reporters, however, did not grumble. This was the star assignment of the week. This visitor was the best story of the month, almost as good as the London elephant Jumbo that Barnum was trying to bring over. This visitor was newer than Tom Thumb, more exciting than Patti and her *Traviata* jewels.

The newsmen went down the deck hunting Oscar Wilde.

There he was, coming out of the captain's cabin. Someone had told him they were here, and he was coming to meet them. They knew him by his height, and nobody but the Aesthete himself, the original Bunthorne, would be wearing that bottle-green fur-lined overcoat with the fur collar, those yellow kid gloves, and that round sealskin cap. There was his long hair, hanging almost to his shoulders.

Drawing closer, the reporters made notes: "Face utterly devoid of color—like putty—eyes bright and quick—face oval, long chin—doesn't look like a Du Maurier model—more like an athlete—instead of having a small, delicate hand only fit to caress a lily, his fingers are long and when doubled up would form a fist that would hit a hard knock." No knee breeches in sight. Advance word was he would wear them. Too bad!

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-six last October," the reporters understood him to say. Back in London his friends and family knew his real age to be twenty-eight.

"What did you come to America for, Mr. Wilde?"

"To lecture at Chickering Hall, and elsewhere if the public approves of my philosophy. Also to produce a play on Nihilism."

The *New York Tribune* man heard Oscar say the disciples of aestheticism were "trying to discover the secret of life."

"And what are aesthetics?" demanded the *Tribune* reporter.

Wilde replied with "a big British haw-haw" and began, "Aesthetics, you know, are the science of the beautiful. In this modern movement there is search after the true, you know. Aestheticism is a sort of correlation of all the arts." It had begun with Keats, said Oscar, and he mentioned other names which the reporters scribbled down more or less accurately—Burne-Jones, Rossetti, William Morris, Swinburne.

Bored, the reporters tried flippant questions:

"Do you like eggs fried on both sides or only on one side?"

"Do you trim your finger-nails in the style of the Empress of Japan?"

"When do you get up in the morning?"

Wilde, repeating these questions in a letter to Sarah Bernhardt, commented, "The Americans are not uncivilized, as they are so often said to be, they are decivilized," and to American friends he would soon be remarking, "Bad manners make a journalist."

"One reporter," Wilde wrote Bernhardt, "impudently interrogated me as to the temperature preferred for my tub and said that he had been told that I always had the water lightly colored with triple essence of verbena."

A few hours later, presenting himself at Mrs. Leslie's door, he would tell that lady how much he hated reporters, and as the editress said later, "he poured out his soul to me on the subject."

After a time the ship newsmen abandoned Wilde and began asking other passengers how the poet had behaved on the way over. One passenger said Wilde had talked of how much he admired a Roumanian gypsy girl among the immigrants below. He had said he sometimes wished he were a gypsy. He had used expressions like "superlatively aesthetic" and "consummately soulful." The passengers chortled, remembering how funny it had been.

What had the *Arizona*'s captain, George Siddons Murray, thought of Oscar?

Well, Captain Murray hadn't liked him; had said, in fact, "I wish I had that man lashed to the bowsprit on the windward side."

Here was a passenger who said he had talked to Oscar on the trip and the poet had complained because "the roaring ocean does not roar"; also "I wish I could see a storm rise and sweep the bridge from the ship"; also "I care not for this tame, monotonous trip." Another pas-

senger came up to report, “I heard him say ‘the trip was too deucedly stupid, don’t you know.’”

The reporters, who had been depressed when Wilde had failed to give them epigrams, now grinned with delight. This was something like it. That night the telegraph wires would tell Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, San Francisco, that Oscar Wilde “was disappointed in the Atlantic.” It did not matter whether Wilde had said this to the re-



### JEWISH IMMIGRATION

*“Columbia welcomes the Victims of German persecution to ‘The Asylum of the Oppressed.’” “Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper,” January 22, 1881.*

porters; the thing sounded like him. Indeed, it would not be until he had returned to Liverpool that he would be heard, by an English reporter, to use the actual words, “The Atlantic is a disappointment.”

But in the first hours of his arrival in America the story was launched, and the report of it went back to England where, soon enough, a piece of doggerel began to circulate:

There's Oscar Wilde, that gifted chylde  
Fair Poesie's anointed,  
Has, like a brick, the Atlantic  
Crossed, to be disappointed.  
Poor Oscar Wilde, aesthetic chylde;  
The Atlantic ought to know it;  
A fault so grave to misbehave  
And disappoint a poet!

Released from quarantine early that morning of January 3rd, the sturdy *Arizona* pushed up the bay toward her North River dock. In the mist, New York began to appear, a towering sky line to British eyes—a building or two actually ten stories high! Most roofs were low enough so that a church spire would not be concealed. On the Brooklyn and Jersey shores rose smoking chimneys and the shoulders of elevator warehouses. The Battery was fringed with business structures and houses, some of them very old. Castle Garden, where immigrants were examined, was sighted.

If Mr. Wilde would have time, this Castle Garden would be worth visiting, for there he could see what was happening to the United States, a thing that pleased some of the older citizens and worried others.

New races were pouring in, lured, Wilde would be told, by two things: cheap land in the West, high wages in Eastern and Middle Western factories.

Up to the late 1860's, the immigrants had been mainly of Celtic or Teutonic stock, easily woven into American life. But now Latins and Slavs, more difficult to blend, were streaming in, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Bohemians, Russians. Up to 1870 there had been no Russians nor Poles, and even between 1870 and 1880 only 50,000 had come, all told. But, the way they were now passing through Castle Garden, it was said by officials that there might be a quarter of a million in the country by 1890. Forecasts had it that the present decade might count over five million immigrants in all, whereas the last decade had numbered only some 2,800,000.

In American weekly journals Wilde could read that a wave of Russian Jewish immigration was setting in, and that liberals of the Celt and Anglo-Saxon blood were welcoming them as fugitives from Czardom—welcoming them, it was suspected, more heartily than did some of the German Jews who had been long established in many parts of the seaboard, and who had sent so many scholars, writers, scientists, to the Mississippi Valley in the migration from Germany in the late 1840's.

Wilde would hear that the prevailing American sentiment was that something ought to be done, and done quickly, about immigration. This year, 1882, it was being said, was the year to do it. Congressmen were drafting laws for what would be the first inclusive immigration act. Objectionable persons, such as convicts and lunatics, would be barred. It was also time to do something about the Chinese. California had

been in ferment for years, and within a few months some Congressional action was expected.

On past Castle Garden went the *Arizona*, past an island, Bedloe's, which rose from a bay that was streaked with the wakes of tugs and ferries. A tremendous statue, *Liberty Enlightening the World*, would soon stand there.

On toward the dock. Suddenly the *Arizona* stuck in the mud and before it could get off, more newspapermen came aboard. With Colonel Morse to help him keep them within bounds, Wilde fared better than at the first encounter.

“Man is hungry for beauty and must be filled,” he told them. “There is a void: Nature will fill it.”

“What about that grain elevator over there, Jersey side?” he was asked.

Wilde said he was too near-sighted to make it out. He'd examine it later. The ship at length was at the dock. Wilde and Morse came to the customs' inspector, behind whom massed a crowd watching Oscar. “It appears,” wrote he to Sarah Bernhardt a little later, “that some of the numerous imaginative ones who are at work to make me famous had spread the story that I slept in gorgeous lace nightgowns.”

His luggage was opened. No lace nightgowns appeared.

“Have you anything to declare?” asked the blue-clad inspector.

“Nothing,” said Oscar; “nothing but my genius.”

### 3

And with that he was off with Colonel Morse for breakfast at Delmonico's and then on to his quarters in the Grand Hotel, at Thirty-first Street and Broadway. At its desk stood a clerk, Michael Toner, who would treasure for years the memory of the Britisher with a sunflower in his buttonhole, splashing his odd signature upon the register. Bellboys showed Oscar to a two-room suite, 142 and 143, from whose windows could be seen, on the south, Lester Wallack's new theater. “Modern, all gas lights sheathed in tin. See the granite-pillared portico! And you should step inside and see the iron-work covered with old gold, the comfortable seats, the decorated proscenium. Wallack, over sixty now, is one of our oldest and finest actor-managers, a spender, too. He's to open his house with *School for Scandal*, Rose Coghlan in the lead.”

Wilde had taken up quarters in the brightest theatrical stretch of Broadway, the street of the drama. Near by were the Academy of Music and the Casino; almost across the street was Daly's, remodeled

from Wood's Museum, three years earlier. Now stars like John Drew and Ada Rehan played there. A clever young juvenile, Otis Skinner, was acting in *Kit, the Arkansas Traveler*.

In dime museums Miss Lizzie Sturgeon was playing the piano with her bare toes—and playing it very well, they said. Long education at



DR. TANNER

*Dr. Henry S. Tanner engaged in his forty-day fast. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," July 24, 1880.*

the hands of Barnum had made Americans fond of freakish attractions and personalities. The biggest native American sensation of the theater in January, 1882, was being described in the press:

“There are few more widely-known names in the United States than that of the Honorable William F. Cody, alias Buffalo Bill. He received this soubriquet from killing, for the Kansas Pacific Railroad in one season, 4,280 buffalo. He makes his home at present at North Platte, Nebraska, where he has a large cattle ranch.”

As scout for the U. S. Army during Indian troubles, Cody had added to his frontier fame, and had been further celebrated by the dime-novels and melodramas written about him by Ned Buntline, “the King of the Dime-Novelists.” Immense crowds had crowded to see him in theaters ever since the night of December 16, 1872, when he had made his stage début in Chicago, playing himself in Buntline’s bloody spectacle, *The Scouts of the Prairie, and Red Deviltry as It Is.* Other Buntline melodramas, notably *Life on the Border*, had served the long-haired Cody well during the decade, but now, in 1882, he was modifying his stage work to include more and more Indian vaudeville performers. He was experimenting with the idea of a Wild West circus under canvas.

Many redskins from the plains were with him, notably one, Wau-Kau-Chaw-Nik-Kaw, the Sioux chief whose footlight oration reporters would translate as “meaning a desire to be left alone in a forest for a few moments with Oscar Wilde.”

Cody was preparing to try out his Wild West show at North Platte on the Fourth of July and if it went well, to take it on tour in 1883. Wise managers were predicting that it would make as much talk as had Dr. Tanner’s forty-day fast.

Oscar Wilde would hear of Tanner’s feat which, ending only seventeen months before, had been a front-page, and even an international, topic. Dr. Henry S. Tanner, a Minneapolis physician, had put himself on exhibition in New York to demonstrate that a man could live forty days and nights without food. Physicians watched him, thousands of people watched him, as he slept and rested. Crowds gaped on the street as he sallied forth for walks or drives, boasting, “I have had a cocktail of water and will now have my breakfast of fresh air.”

The newspapers noted, among his massed callers, that “his most steadfast friends are the ladies, who evince a degree of confidence in him and admiration for his heroic enterprise.” And as the fast progressed, their degrees of confidence mounted to fever heat. They brought him flowers, sang for him, played the organ, and, as the fortieth day drew near, tried to kiss his gaunt, oddly whiskered face.

To a watching world he announced that he would break his fast at noon of the great day, August 7th, with a large watermelon, and as a result enough melons for a regiment of desert soldiers came piling in at his hall. On the fateful morning, cases of champagne, barrels of raw oysters, piles of hams, rooms full of food, were awaiting the stroke of noon. Physicians warned the now weak and highly irritable Tanner to avoid watermelon, but he ordered one to be cut and held against the moment when an obliging stationary engineer next door would sound noon on his steam whistle.

A thousand people were fighting to see him, scores of reporters were being jammed against walls, well-dressed women were pressing handkerchiefs against their mouths, when the great toot came. Everybody applauded and cheered as Dr. Tanner arose from his chair. He had won! And everybody cheered again when he brushed aside the protesting medical authorities and fell upon the watermelon. They cheered each bite, and the racket grew louder as, full of melon, he walked out onto the street and took a triumphal ride through the city in an open carriage, displaying a red slice of melon in his hand and a whole melon on the seat beside the driver. He spent the afternoon and evening at the home of one of his doctors, where he guzzled melon diligently, interspersing it with ale, wine, some stewed potatoes and several pounds of beefsteak. At sundown he cried in ecstasy, "My whole body feels like a hive of bees," but he was soon asleep. Around midnight he sat up in bed shouting that he had had a wonderful dream about a watermelon, and must have one instantly. He had it, and within a few days was walking the streets, hale and hearty, and plaguing the medical profession with his claim that he had established a new principle—gorging was much more healthful than restrained and regular meals.

As New Yorkers recalled him, in 1882, they remembered how pointed had been his eulogies of "Georgia watermelons" and how much had been printed about the supplies sent him by the Georgia growers. Could it have been that Dr. Tanner had been working as an advertiser, somewhat like Oscar Wilde was working to publicize *Patience*?

Wilde heard endless talk of how European artists compared with the native brand, how foreign singers had the best of it with Patti, Christine Nilsson, Campanini, Materna—and instrumentalists, Remenyi, Rubinstein, De Pachmann. Sarah Bernhardt had been as successful in drama as any American actresses, even if Yankees did jest about her, saying, "An empty cab drove up and Sarah Bernhardt got out."

Modjeska came over yearly for a tour of glory, tears, and dollars. But, America asked, were the foreigners any better players than Edwin Booth, Lester Wallack, Mary Anderson, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson, Clara Morris, or even young Richard Mansfield?

If Wilde was interested in beauties he should see the new one, Lillian Russell, whom Tony Pastor was displaying in the burlesque of *Patience* at his Music Hall on Fourteenth Street.

Would Wilde like to meet the Eric Bagley Company, which was rehearsing Burnand's *The Colonel* at Abbey's Park Theater in preparation for its opening on January 16th?

The visiting Britisher had to be informed, very quickly, upon the uses of advertising in America, for instance the taking of photographs. The public was fond of buying pictures of notables and of filing them in albums among photographs of relatives.

Sarony was the cameraman chosen by Colonel Morse. Sarony had the reputation. Sarony was the most spectacular photographer of celebrities, and would pay the highest for the privilege of securing the sittings. Yes, it would be explained to Wilde, Charles Dickens had started that custom when, on his second lecture tour in America in 1867-68, sporting a velvet coat and a flower, he had refused to sit for photographer Burney until well paid. Fanny Kemble was said to have made Sarony pay her \$300, Patti \$1,000, and Bernhardt \$1,500.

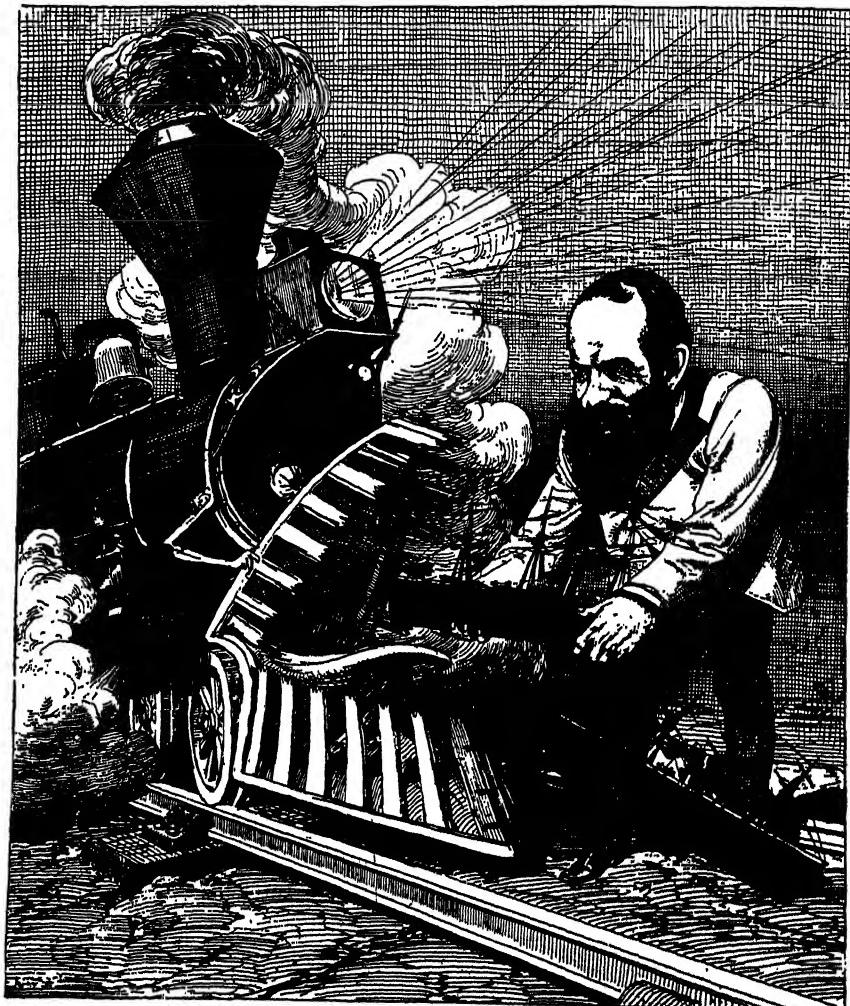
But New York heard that Colonel Morse was so eager for Sarony to shoot his star that he waived the customary charge.

“A picturesque subject, indeed!” cried little Sarony, dancing about till his habitual red fez shook, as Wilde arrived holding a white cane across his fur-lined overcoat. Sarony took him first in his seal-skin cap, then bareheaded in his long trousers, then bareheaded in his knee breeches. As each pose was held Sarony would cease jabbering, turn and stare out of the window in rapt silence while an assistant took the picture.

Sarony later told reporters the results were splendid, although he couldn't say Wilde was as pretty as Pauline Markham, late belle of *The Black Crook*, that gaudy and licentious musical extravaganza of perennial notoriety.

Oscar's début was nearly a week away, and although callers and invitations were many, he had time to see New York, the city of a million people. It was, he thought, not so different from European capitals as he had expected, but it was certainly noisier. “America is the noisiest

country that ever existed," he decided. He was awakened each morning, "not by the singing of the nightingale, but by the steam whistle"—also by the rattle of horse-cars. He saw "an air of comfort in the appearance of the people"—which meant that his hosts had not taken him to the swarming East Side where immigrants jammed into tenements,



THE IRON JAWS THAT SMASHED THE SOUTHERN  
PACIFIC MAIL

*Jay Gould as a financial juggler and wrecker of railroad and steamship lines; the "Daily Graphic," New York, March 19, 1875.*

nor to the Italian and Negro quarters south of Washington Square, nor to the north where among wastes of rock, sand, and weeds, squatters clung to crazy shacks built of stolen lumber.

A remarkable characteristic of the Americans, said Wilde, was their use of science. Across in New Jersey, he read, Thomas Edison was producing a thousand electric lamps a day. Within a few months the first shaft would go down as the beginning of a tunnel under the Hudson River. The Brooklyn Bridge which, even in a far more incomplete state, had made Sarah Bernhardt swoon, would be open to traffic, it was being announced, inside of twelve months. Unsightly telephone poles—Wilde pronounced it “teel-a-phone”—grew out of the curbs and tangled the air with wires. Iron stilts held elevated railroads over people’s heads, and groaned, as obnoxious locomotives steamed along.

Tales of the money Americans were making, talk of money, boasts of money, pounded in the poet’s ears.

To a reporter from the *Philadelphia Press* who had come to New York to meet the sensational Britisher, Wilde revealed his amazement at New York’s rich men. The reporter set Oscar off by asking, “What are your politics, Liberal or Conservative, Mr. Wilde?”

“Oh, do you know,” Oscar answered, “those matters are of no interest to me. I know only two terms—civilization and barbarism; and I am on the side of civilization. It is very strange that in the House of Commons you never hear the word ‘Civilization.’ They spend night after night squabbling over petty things, when they ought to be working against barbarism. Then, in our country, there is seldom a piece of legislation that does not benefit one class more than another; and that perhaps makes the wretched party spirit more bitter. But Gladstone is the greatest Prime Minister England ever had.”

“A short time before I came to America, he said to me that from the United States would come at once the greatest danger and the greatest good to civilization. The greatest danger is the vast accumulation of capital, and the greatest good is the perfect simplicity of American politics, and the fact that the only reason for the passage of a great law over here is that it is for the good of the whole people. The personal control of capital, with the power it gives over labor and life, has only appeared in modern American life.

“We have as yet nothing like it in England. We call a man rich over there when he owns a share of Scotland, or a county or so. But he doesn’t have such a control of ready money as does an American capitalist.”

"Ready money" in America was impressing Wilde, just as it had impressed, awed, or outraged almost every foreigner who had visited America since 1862. It was a new civilization—this "ready-money America"—one that had burst upon the land in the last twenty years, a civilization of the stock exchange, the corporation, the great centralized industries that had supplanted the older system in which wealth had been anchored in the soil or to the small privately held factory.

In New York, Wilde was seeing the great collectors and possessors of mountainous cash, owners of vast properties which could be transformed quickly into currency. Wealth had become fluid after the Civil War had so suddenly, violently, accelerated industrial progress as to overwhelm the agrarian civilization and to make the United States, only seventeen years after that war's close, the greatest manufacturing nation in the world.

In the rush of money into the more fluid channels of trade and industrial expansion, there had resulted corruption, speculation, and titanic concentration. Money unchained had careened willfully and wildly, escaping from the control of so many of its handlers, and spreading wreckage, panics, and scandals. The men who could manipulate shrewdly or luckily had become millionaires, and they were flocking to New York, especially from California, where mining and railroading had produced fabulous wealth. The numbers of the new-rich in Manhattan now astonished visiting foreigners; and, of the money-titans, the most spectacular were "the railroad millionaires"—Jay Gould, of New England Yankee stock, sleeping in a \$25,000 bed and dreaming of more monopolies to add to those he had established in national communication; Collis Huntington, the Pacific Coast plutocrat, afraid to sleep in his new \$2,000,000 Manhattan mansion because he believed a man always died when he moved into a house he had long desired; Edward H. Harriman, coming up from a broker's desk to seize the Illinois Central Railroad and start a far-flung track system of his own; J. Pierpont Morgan, the new financier, turning toward railroad control, riding in a \$100,000 private palace car, and glowering so silently, so ominously, that business men all around him were deciding that the way to be big and successful was to be deep and silent, too; William H. Vanderbilt, inheritor of the fortune of his father, the late Commodore, expander of railroads, and builder of a fabulous new mansion in New York, a Greek-Renaissance phenomenon crammed with armor, bric-a-brac, paintings, tapestries.

Chaotic quarrels raged among and about the railroads. Financiers were saying they had developed America. Reformers were saying they had ruined America. Historians were saying the expansionists, in giving immense blocks of Western lands to railroad builders, had cheated the public out of its birthright. Other historians were saying the unity of the nation had been established by bonds of railroad iron. Farmers were saying railroad promoters had persuaded them to invest in railway stock, then had bankrupted them by wrecking the roads, squeezing out the little investors, then righting the companies again. Other farmers were saying railroad colonizers had given them easy terms for land near the right-of-way, then forced them to raise one crop which was shipped at the railroad's terms, and left them to import, at high freight rates, whatever else they needed for livelihood.

Outcries were being heard against the secret arrangements by which the railroads were assisting Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller to crush their rivals in steel and oil respectively. The word “trust” was heard in a few obscure camps of visionary radicals. Jay Gould had been the first against whom the wild-eyed epithet had been applied when he had lately appeared in all his might as owner of all the telegraph and much of the railroad communications of the country, owner of the *New York World*—with which he destroyed confidence in companies he wished to buy at his own price—owner of elevated railroads in New York, controller of press services to newspapers.

And now in 1882 John D. Rockefeller was crowning seventeen years of ruthless concentration in oil by combining into his Standard Oil Company more than ninety per cent of the nation's product. Within the year, it was promised, he would establish his offices in New York—on Wall Street.

Inside great counting houses it was being said that, within a year, Henry C. Frick, who held a monopoly in coke, would combine with Andrew Carnegie and give the latter something that might be as all-powerful as was held by either Rockefeller or Gould.

Experts pointed out that at least one-fourth of all railroad indebtedness was pure water—the New York Central holding \$48,000,000 worth of that fictitious commodity. Statisticians demonstrated that the country had already twice the mileage that could be used with profit.

But America, emerging from the lean years of the panic, was forgetting doubt and misery; it was scorning the danger signals, and was pouring its money again into the pockets of railroad promoters. In 1881, over 8,500 miles of track had been laid, and the schedule for 1882 called for 10,000 miles more. At the present rate of investment

over \$3,000,000,000 would have gone into railroads between January, 1880, and December, 1885.

Oscar Wilde had come upon an America which was developing a new Manifest Destiny. In the old civilization America had seemed destined to become the one place in all the world where the common man was supreme, where the farmer and the artisan were independent, captains of their souls, masters of their fate. That romantic dream was now gone, and it was manifest to some that America was destined to be the one place in all the world where the business man was supreme—dignified and honored as in no other age or nation—the business man, set free to climb and to rule.

Oscar Wilde, like another Gulliver, was discovering Brobdingnagians.

## 2

### LILIES OVER LADIES' HEARTS

THERE was the gleam and shimmer of black around Mrs. D. G. Croly, better known as "Jennie June," the writer, as she stood in her drawing-room on East Thirty-eighth Street, late Sunday evening, January 8th.

Black shone on the two guests of honor whom she introduced to the New York celebrities who thronged forward. Louisa May Alcott, chief of the two guests—the reception had been given for her—looked out from under her black bonnet and over the bosom of her black silk dress, as she held forth her hand. Black velvet was lustrous on the back, arms and legs—to the knees—of Oscar Wilde, who, having arrived at eleven o'clock, was now sharing if not outshining Louisa May. His long black silk stockings were in everybody's eyes and on everybody's tongue.

They stood together, the young Londoner and the New England woman almost twice his age. She was fifty, gray-haired, and well used to compliments from people who, since *Little Women* had stormed the country, read everything she wrote.

Jennie June introduced the other guests—Alexander Salvini, the actor; Henry Watterson, aged forty-two and making his *Louisville Courier-Journal* famous; Kate Field, lecturer, and head of the co-operative Dress Association; Mrs. Jeanette E. Walker, pen-name

"Angela"; the Marquis de Luneville; and Robert Roosevelt, rich man wondering how far his young nephew Theodore was going to go in the New York State Legislature while gnashing his big white teeth at over-rich railroads and banks; Mrs. Edmund Clarence Stedman, whose husband had been detained.

As a matter of fact, Stedman, serious poet with an honorable beard, had flatly refused to go where he might meet Wilde, whom he ticketed in his diary—"This Philistine town is making a fool of itself over Oscar Wilde. Pah!" and of whom he would soon write to a Boston editor, "So far as I know, the genuine writers, poets and journalists of this city have kept out of his [Wilde's] way and are not over-pleased with the present revelation of the state of culture on Murray Hill and among our *soi-disant* intelligent and fashionable classes. . . . He is a shrewd man of the world, and D'Oyly Carte is running him as a speculation!" Stedman sat at home grumbling his belief that Wilde, through D'Oyly Carte, "obtained five hundred letters to prominent Americans for a grand monetary campaign. They will make \$100,000 and all England will think us moneyed fools." Stedman knew of many "genuine" writers, like himself, who had refused to acknowledge the letters of introduction which Wilde brought.

Sitting apart from Jennie June's home, on this Sunday evening, were Richard Watson Gilder, new editor of *Century*, Henry M. Alden, editor of *Harper's Monthly*, Charles Dudley Warner, Helen Hunt, Richard Henry Stoddard—a conservative circle. Likewise the golden circle of Vanderbilts, Goelets, Astors, with their ringmaster, Ward McAllister, sat elsewhere. The cream of the "stiff-necks" in literature and society kept aloof.

Suddenly Jennie June, this Sunday night, said "Clara Morris!" and there stood the one actress Oscar Wilde wanted most to meet. To reporters soon after his landing, he had said, "I wish to see Clara Morris dressed all in white brocaded satin." And here she stood in the very gown.

But Miss Morris was either coy or afraid of the big, intense poetic eyes that shone upon her. After the introduction she moved off, Oscar following and begging her "not to run away." He said, "I am nobody, but Sarah Bernhardt is an authority; she has told me how greatly she admires your acting. There are many things I should like to say to you."

He had *Vera* on his mind.

They talked, but not to his satisfaction.

All week the newspapermen had been busy with him. Earlier that very afternoon, a *New York Tribune* reporter had found him in a private home trying to escape the lion-hunters at the hotel. Lounging in a brown dressing-gown with red braid on his brown trousers, and red silk socks shining, he had discussed Du Maurier, puffing at a long cigarette while he talked.

"I have never felt pained at all by his caricatures or those of anyone else, and I think I have enjoyed them as much as anyone."

"In 1878 I went to London and took a house on the bank of the Thames, near Charing Cross Bridge. It was almost a counterpart of the one in which I lived in Oxford, and embodied our ideas. Since then I have frequently met Du Maurier in society and have talked with him about his caricatures as if I were not interested in them at all. When I have thought them clever I have told him so, as I did when I thought them stupid. A party of my friends and myself went to see *Patience* on the first night and we laughed and jeered as it deserved."

"As to Du Maurier's characters, I suppose that I am the original of Maudle, the poet. Postlethwaite, the artist, has no original, but is a combination of the peculiarities of a number of my friends. . . .

"If an artist is not a mere sham, he cannot be disturbed by any caricature or exaggeration. He has the truth on his side and the opinion of the whole world should be of no consequence to him."

"The first time that the absolute stupidity of the English people was ever revealed to me was one Sunday at the Oxford University Church when the preacher opened his sermon in something this way, 'When a young man says, not in polished banter, but in sober earnestness that he finds it difficult to live up to the level of his blue china, there has crept into the cloistered shades a form of heathenism which it is our bounden duty to fight against and to crush out if possible.'

"I need hardly say that we were delighted and amused at the typical English way in which our ideas were misunderstood. They took our epigrams as earnest and our parodies as prose."

His drawling tones were in contrast with his plea for energy, as he told the reporter, "I do not believe poets and artists should live in solitude, but rather that they should associate with each other and mix freely in society. I have always done this myself, and I have preached my theories in every salon in London."

It was while explaining how marked had been the affect of aestheticism on English homes that Wilde broke the news that his costumes,

which had so startled America, were only the beginning of his sartorial plans. The velvet coats and knee breeches were only a partial exposition of his theories. "I intend after a right interval to follow them out entirely."

## 3

The week had been teas by day and receptions by night, his "introduction to New York society" having been made at the home of Augustus Hayes, Jr., a "gilded youth" and travel writer, who had, in imitation of Lady Wilde's salons, drawn heavy curtains against the wan light of a winter afternoon. Standing before a Japanese umbrella, Wilde had stood "like a heathen idol" in a pinkish glow, telling London anecdotes to Mayor and Mrs. Grace, and crowds of others. A *Tribune* reporter heard that he had said, "In 300 years England will know that Whistler is its greatest painter," and that when asked about the Atlantic Ocean he had said, "I have never known such loneliness. There was such a broad expanse of water, a desert, as one may say, and I felt at times as though it would have been a great relief could I have seen a single fishing smack."

Other reporters heard him say he had been to see Mary Anderson's *Juliet* at the Booth Theater, and that, while she was "a very beautiful woman," there were "traditions about dressing in Shakespearean performances that detract from the pleasure of witnessing these plays." Miss Anderson "did excellently but I should prefer to see her in other plays than those of Shakespeare. Why, Modjeska delighted London until she made her appearance as Juliet. Then she seemed to lose her hold upon her audience."

The names of personages more weighty in the social and civic life of New York had begun to appear on invitations that came to Oscar's door. He was entertained in the homes of John Bigelow, once an editor of the *Evening Post* and Minister to France, and of that blue-blooded but unsuccessful Civil War leader, General George B. McClellan. The staid Century Club made Wilde its guest, the *Tribune* learning that only one member had objected—"a venerable poet," who "went about the club saying, 'Where is she? Well, why not say "she." I understand she's a Charlotte-Ann.'"

But it was the stage-and-platform circles which had spread themselves. At the Lambs' Club, where actors gathered, Oscar met Steele MacKaye, the player and manager, and established a friendship that would last. Henry E. Abbey, the theatrical producer, introduced Wilde to John Burroughs, the forty-five-year-old bank-examiner whose books on nature were growing more and more popular, and who was thinking

soon of retiring to his farm, eighty miles up the Hudson, and giving himself over wholly to literature. Burroughs observed that Oscar "was a splendid talker, and a handsome man, but a voluptuary. As he walked from you, there was something in the motion of hips and back that was disagreeable." At a "Bohemian lunch" given by Kate Field, Wilde



WILDE AT A RECEPTION

*Sketch of Wilde at a reception in New York by a staff artist. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," January 21, 1882.*

talked with F. D. Millet the painter, and Elihu Vedder, who was illustrating a new edition of the *Rubáiyát*.

More friendly than any of the writers or painters whom Oscar met was the forty-one-year-old Joaquin Miller, who had worn hair as long and costume as eccentric as the Aesthete's when he, during several visits across the past decade, had stamped the art and social worlds of London. "The American Byron," Britishers had called him; they stared open-mouthed as he told tales of his life as a squaw-man, as a gold-miner, Indian fighter, Oregon jurist, and editor of wild mountain gazettes. London had been charmed at his habit of always wearing his hat in the house, and at his Spanish vaquero attire visible morning, noon, and night. He was happier in London than in America, and could talk long to Wilde of his own idolatry of Swinburne, his worship of Lily Langtry, and his indebtedness to William Michael Rossetti—brother of the poet and Pre-Raphaelite in his own right—who had first brought him to British salons.

## 4

But of all the men whom Oscar might meet in the round of dinners and receptions, the one who could help him most was a ruddy, bald, Napoleonic Marshal of a man, aged sixty-eight, and fabulous in America as "the greatest entertainer of visiting foreigners."

Sam Ward—Uncle Sam Ward society called him—was, according to his sister, the poetess and reformer, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, "one of the most enchanting personalities that ever brightened this world." And the late Charles Sumner, august scholar of the United States Senate, had said, "I disagree with Sam Ward on almost every human topic, but when I have talked with him five minutes, I forget everything save that he is the most delightful company in the world."

For twenty years and more, Uncle Sam had been celebrated in New York, Boston, Newport, Washington, London, Paris, Berlin as a *bon vivant*, wit, spendthrift, and epicure. He knew the Prince of Wales intimately; he was beloved by Gladstone and was a most intimate friend of Lord Rosebery; he knew the Pre-Raphaelite artists better than did Oscar, and as an aesthete could have made the visiting poet feel very small indeed if it had not been Uncle Sam's habit to make everybody feel very important indeed. He made it his life work to become popular, and he had succeeded in spite of a certain taint that clung to him. It was not a stain upon his private morals or manners, but the truth was, the old landed aristocrats would say, that Sam Ward had sold himself down the river to unscrupulous financiers. Ward had, until

recently, been "King of the Lobby" in Washington, an elegant, high-born, charming gentleman whose vocation it had been to seduce wrong-headed congressmen into passing the laws which his rich clients needed, or killing bills which would harm "sound business."

"The incarnation of European luxury" was what fashionable folk said of Sam Ward's way of life, so prodigal and, at the same time, delicate was he with his dinners and anecdotes. And so skilled was he in the technique of the perfect dinner, that he ate nothing himself at his functions, but devoted his whole time to table-talk that would amuse his guests. This did not mean that he went hungry, for it was his practice to fortify himself, before company came, with a large lamb chop and a glass of Burgundy. Upon occasion, Uncle Sam would do the cooking, especially when he was to feed his guests on Virginia ham. He had a recipe for boiling hams in champagne that called for the dropping in of a wisp of new-mown hay at a certain split second.

With the tastes of a cultured Continental, he drank only wine, called hard liquor barbaric, and was immensely proud that his name had been formally affixed in all barrooms to a yellow chartreuse, lemon peel, cracked ice drink that he had invented.

At his home, 84 Clinton Place, Uncle Sam gave a dinner for Oscar Wilde, one that New York soon heard had displayed the host at his best, for the table had been "surrounded with calla lilies," and lilies of the valley had lain at each plate. And Ward had written a song, "The Valley Lily," had persuaded Stephen Masset to set it to music, and at the climax of the dinner had had a singer deliver it among the blossoms and the champagne bottles.

Sam Ward had still another bond with Oscar Wilde, for he was a poet too. Once, a generation before, he had twitted his sister Julia about her first book of verse, the anonymous *Passion Flowers*.

"I can do as well," he had announced, and within a few weeks had written and published *Lyrical Recreations*.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was friendly to Ward, and if Wilde wished to see the dean of American poets when he visited Boston, Uncle Sam would be just the man to give the necessary letter of introduction. And there was nobody who was anybody in Washington whom Sam Ward could not approach. As for the West, Sam was not so well acquainted there. The only men who had interested him there were the Indians and he had known them a long time ago.





### OSCAR THE APOSTLE

"*'Puck's' 'Wilde' Dream of an Aesthetic Future for America.*" F. Opper, cartoonist of "*Puck*," welcomes Oscar Wilde to New York on January 11, 1882.

## 5

From plenty of New Yorkers, Wilde could learn more about this elegant old gentleman who, as his nephew, F. Marion Crawford, said, "is the only man of his time who can wear precious stones without vulgarity . . . who moves like a king." Young Crawford was, at the time, putting his uncle into a novel, calling him *Horace Bellingham* and having him move captivatingly with his great white mustache, his imperial, his "superb diamonds in his shirt . . . his ring of priceless sapphires," through the book called *Doctor Claudius*.

The tragedy of Sam Ward's life was that his father, Samuel, had, as the family later admitted, "forced the boy's brilliant and effervescent spirit into the Wall Street mold with disastrous effect." The father, an austere Puritan banker of New York, had regarded society and gayety as wrong. He preferred to give funds to churches out in the barbaric West, to help found New York University, and to collect paintings.

His eldest son, Sam, must be a scholar and financier, so the grim banker had sent the youth to study under George Bancroft, the historian, at Round Hill School, then to Columbia, and, when young Sam had graduated eighteen months ahead of his class, to Heidelberg University. In Europe the boy's amazing gift for languages, for singing in a "lovely tenor voice" and for executing mathematical problems, had made him popular. He had translated Laplace's *Mécanique Céleste* so ably that the author and Victor Hugo had introduced him to other scholars who in turn introduced him to dukes, and they to princes and premiers.

In 1838 he had come home with a magnificent library in boxes, and Bohemia in his heart. Around the solemn stone mansion of his father he sang Heidelberg songs until his two sisters and brother nearly lost their senses dreaming of distant romance. Then he went to work in the bank owned by his father's firm, Prime, Ward and King, and showed such incapacity the first day that Ward, Sr., growled, "You'll play the very devil with the check-book, sir, if you use it in this way."

And soon he was still further off from Paris, and the long, mad evenings with the girls and his crony, Jules Jaurin, the famous critic; still further off, because he was marching down a church aisle with Emily, the daughter of William B. Astor. In the wedding procession came his beloved sister Julia watching with pride how "on the forehead of the bride shone a diamond star, the gift of her grandfather"—the one and only John Jacob Astor.

The union of the wealthy families did not last long, for Emily Astor

Ward soon died, with Sam's sister Louisa taking his infant daughter to raise. In 1843 Sam married another beautiful heiress, Medora, daughter of the New Orleans aristocrat, John R. Grymes—Medora, even more a monarch in fashion than Sam himself had come to be. His family, which opposed his union with the Creole belle, felt justified when, a little later, the marriage went on the rocks.

With the death of his father, Sam quit the firm, set up as a broker on Wall Street, revenged himself upon the Puritan strictness of his youth, played the very devil with the check-book, went smash, and in 1848 struck off for California and the gold mines. Too gently bred to bend all day over a sieve in a creek, he set up a mercantile house in San Francisco. By 1851 he had made a fortune and lost it in a fire. For the next nine years he roamed, living with the Piute Indians once to win his bet that he could learn their language in three weeks, chasing gold mines in Mexico, hunting concessions in South and Central America and once, in 1862, representing the United States Government on a diplomatic mission to renew rights for the crossing of Nicaragua.

Romantic rumors about his travels drifted back to New York—women loved him, one, indeed, being said to have adopted boy's clothing in order to be with him.

It was as a bachelor that Washington knew him on his return from Nicaragua, a bachelor and spendthrift with none of the reformer blood that his father, as a founder of the New York City Temperance Society, had bequeathed to Julia. Mrs. Howe was blowing the trumpets of abolition and woman suffrage, while Sam settled down in Washington to practice and to perfect the newly discovered profession of lobbyist.

At dinner—particularly at dinners to Europeans who arrived curious about the famous feat—he would tell how his sister Julia had come to write "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Wilde as a fellow poet would be one to ask about it, and Sam would tell how Julia had gone to the army camps around Washington in 1861 with her husband, Dr. Howe, who was doing relief work, and how all one autumn day she had ridden in a carriage past soldiers who sang a new song, a great song, "John Brown's Body." She had sung it with them, and a preacher sitting beside her, James Freeman Clarke—Wilde would probably meet him in Boston, eloquent fellow—had said to her, "You ought to write some new words to that tune."

That night, the rhythm, the swinging, marching rhythm, had beaten in her veins. She couldn't sleep. One grandsire, far back, had ridden and sung with Cromwell, and he rode again that night in the tent in Virginia. Suddenly, as Julia had told Sam, "she found the wished-for

lines arranging themselves in her brain." She got out of bed, found a pencil, the back of an envelope, and let "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" write itself.

It had been quite a success. The *Atlantic Monthly* had given her five dollars for it.

Tales like this flowered from Uncle Sam's lips as he sat, with a rose in his buttonhole, and a curiously preserved youthfulness in his gray eye and ruddy cheeks, entertaining Oscar Wilde.

## 6

As New York listened for the newest reports of dinners for Oscar Wilde, there came rumors of a certain all-night stag given by the British stage producer, Bailey, in a second-floor room at Brown's Chop House, on Broadway. Bailey and various wags—one of them H. C. Bunner, editor of *Puck*, which had been lampooning Oscar without mercy—had decided to find out what kind of man this sunflower apostle really was. If there was a real man behind the showman's mask, hard liquor would reveal it.

The party began late in the evening, with Oscar on the right of the host, and on his other side, Harrison Grey Fiske, the theatrical man. The talk began and Wilde, knowing nothing of Bunner, was soon lamenting that America had no humorous journals like *Punch*. At this Bunner rose, told who he was and said, "Come and visit our plant. We have the only lithographed weekly in America."

Everybody laughed, and Wilde and Bunner were thenceforth friends.

The dinner went on with rich foods and rare wines and distillations car-



"AESTHETICISM  
AS OSCAR  
UNDERSTANDS IT"

*A cartoon in the "Daily Graphic," New York, January 11, 1882, beneath which ran these lines:*

Conceive me if you can,  
A pallid and thin young man,  
A crotchety, crank'd young man,  
A greenery-yallery, chickering gallery,  
Dollar and a half young man.

ried in by hastening waiters. Fiske noted how prodigiously Oscar disposed of oysters, chops, eggs, assorted cheeses, and how endlessly the drinks went down the Britisher's long throat. Whisky and soda, soda and whisky, all round, over again, and on and on. The night passed, and as the dawn was about to break, the guests began to arise. They gripped at phantom chairs and stepped elaborately over innocent shadows on the floor. Through a fog they saw Oscar, having arisen steady as a church, lead them firmly, steadily, calmly down the stairs. While they clutched at banisters, put on the wrong overcoats and fumbled with each other's hats, they saw the long hair of the tall Aesthete move casually toward the door. On the street, Bailey, standing amid the weaving group, said to Oscar, "Would you like to be escorted to your rooms?"

"No, thanks," said Oscar politely. "Really, it's a wonderful night for a stroll"—and stroll was exactly what they saw him do, as they helped each other into hansom cabs.

## 7

From the day Wilde landed, New York had wondered what attitude he would take toward *Patience*, which was so sensationaly prosperous at the Standard Theater. Signs were up over town saying that he would talk on "The English Renaissance" at Chickering Hall the night of Monday, January 9th. Would he attack *Patience*? What did he think of it, anyway?

On the morning of Friday, January 7th, New York had its answer, for the newspapers told how Oscar had appeared last night at the theater. Into a box at 8:30 had come Colonel and Mrs. Morse, leading a bevy of ladies, also Mr. and Mrs. Hayes and Mr. and Mrs. Mack. As they rustled into their seats Lady Jane, one of *Patience*'s characters, was saying, "There is a transcendentality of delirium—an acute accentuation of supremest ecstasy, which the earthly might mistake for indigestion." And as she ended, into Morse's box came Oscar Wilde, clad in his velvet coat, his knee breeches and a red silk handkerchief flowing out from his waistcoat across his oceanic shirt front.

The audience turned from Oscar as Bunthorne, in the person of J. H. Ryley, came on the stage, singing:

Though my book I seem to scan,  
In a rapt ecstatic way. . . .

Everybody turned back to the box to see how Oscar would take this satire upon himself. Lolling as he was, in the shadows of the box, his

expression could not be seen, but next day the newspapers said that he had observed to a lady next him, "Caricature is the tribute which mediocrity pays to genius."

The first act over, Morse led the party backstage, where Wilde was at his most affable, congratulating the company. Then he returned with his hosts and sat the performance through. At the end, fully fifty people waited in the foyer to see the Aesthete depart, but eventually the lights were turned out. He had left by a side exit.

That Morse had been successful in putting Oscar to the uses of D'Oyly Carte was immediately apparent. Newspapers in New York and all over the country printed the story of how the original and the imitation Aesthete had met. New crowds recognized Oscar on the street, new hosts pushed invitations upon him.

## 8

Mrs. Frank Leslie put into her *Illustrated Newspaper* a description of her friend:

"He has a decided affection for a color between brown and green, a tint never yet seen on sea or land, and he edges as close to it as may be. His high, very high silk hat, of that shape worn by the officers of the Guards after Waterloo, is of itself a reminder of the days of the Regency, when Beau Brummell and pea green hats were correct form. Beneath this 'glorious old hat' flows the light brown hair in a cataract, over a high collar touching the base of the skull, also a fashion of the year '15. This coat is of delicate brown, with a green struggling for mastery. The braid is broad enough for the pelisse of a Magyar. This garment is long as a High Church curate's, and buttoned about midway so as to reveal the low-cut, turned-down collar, with its knot of pale, fainting-green Chinese silk, tied by the poet's own lily-white hand. From beneath the skirts of this coat appear the trousers of the same hue, adorned on the sides with double stripes of silk-bound braid. Laced boots, varnished in three coats, flash out, the toes pointed as the ace of spades.

"This is the 'get up' of Oscar Wilde by daylight, as he lounges down the Avenue, a white stick—presented to him at the Acropolis and supposed to have been cut from the olive groves of the Academy—in his almond-white, lavender-kid-gloved hand.

"Oscar Wilde is almost niched and pedestaled by society. The frantic endeavors of Mrs. Leo Hunter to induce him to show himself in stifling parlors are something incredible. Letters, verses, flowers, petitions, flow in upon him in perfumed rivulets. Lilies pour in upon Mr. Wilde. In

society, young ladies sport them over their beating hearts in order to attract his attention."

If Oscar took advantage of the romantic possibilities of the hour, no newspaperman mentioned it. Back in London, Wilde's friends heard from overseas that Oscar "had been offended because fashionable New



PORTRAITS OF A LECTURER

*Portraits of Wilde drawn during his opening lecture in New York.  
"Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," January 21, 1882.*

York youths wanted to take him out to see the girls." Yet, according to *Leslie's*, American men had found Wilde "a most charming companion," one who "can tell a racy story of Swinburne, or a *mot de Labouchère*," or "cap a quotation from Aristophanes," and as a dinner-out he was astonishing Fifth Avenue hostesses and butlers by his capacity for talk and food "at banquets worthy of Lucullus."

New York was discovering him to be in the tradition of British dandies from the days of Charles the Second down.

## 9

On the night of January 9th, the social season reached its peak with the Patriarchs' Ball, most exclusive of functions, at Delmonico's. The seventy-five top names in the social register—all that the Patriarchs would permit in their ranks—were represented: Astors, Vanderbilts, Fishes, Iselins, Goelets, Lydigs, Lorillard Spencers, Tillinghasts, Clews, and Traverses.

But for all that and all that, there was a stream of carriages bearing important and elegant folk to Chickering Hall the same evening—and as reporters scanned the crowd, they loosely wrote, "Everybody known in New York society seemed to be there," and "There were staid matrons, pretty women and a charming array of fair and 'rapturous maidens,'" several clergymen including a Catholic priest, business men, and figures well known in conservative clubs, the last-named looking as bored as they did at Wagnerian operas. One chronicler noted, leaning against the wall back of the parquet, "many aesthetic and pallid young men in dress suits and banged hair."

In a few minutes, the gas lights were turned on full throughout the house. Then on the stage two men appeared. One was Colonel Morse, the other Oscar Wilde. All eyes leaped to Oscar's clothes. Yes, there were the black plush knee breeches, the silk stockings encasing shapely calves, the dress coat, white vest and rolling collar, the large white necktie. His feet were clad in what had lately been nicknamed "low-water" shoes. In the shirt-front gleamed diamond studs.

But where was the sunflower? The audience looked incredulously. He was no direct copy of Bunthorne, after all.

Morse and Wilde advanced, amid titters, to their chairs which stood lonely upon the large stage, sat down, waited during an embarrassing moment of silence. Reporters noted that Oscar was blushing. Then the Colonel arose, announced the title of the lecture, and retired. Wilde came forth, laid his manuscript upon the reading-desk and began in what was noted to be a "grim silence." Hostility and curiosity faced

him. Of real friends in that great sea of faces, Oscar had but a handful. He began to speak. His voice was unnatural. It sounded "sepulchral" to certain listeners.

It was Keats, "the pure and sublime artist," Keats the forerunner of the Pre-Raphaelites, that he dwelt upon as he spoke; Keats, whose disciples had determined to revolutionize poetry and painting. Then, without bitterness, but with a higher tone in his voice, he declared that these same young men had "the things which the English public never forgives: Youth, power and enthusiasm."

The audience was listening hard.

"If you ask nine-tenths of the British public about the Pre-Raphaelites you will hear something about an eccentric lot of young men to whom belong a sort of divine crookedness and holy awkwardness in drawing all the chief objects of art. To know nothing about these great men is one of the necessary elements of English education. The satire that was paid them is the homage mediocrity pays to genius."

Listeners, here and there, noted that he had liked his *bon mot* at the *Patience* performance well enough to repeat it.

The lecturer continued his thrusts at England.

"To disagree with three-fourths of England on all points is one of the first elements of vanity; a deep source of consolation in all moments of spiritual doubt."

Listening ears caught, from the monotonous flow of words, sentences that seemed to give the young man's doctrine of art:

"It is not increased moral sense your literature needs. Indeed we should never talk of a moral or an immoral poem. Poems are either well written or badly written. That is all. A good work aims at the purely artistic effect. Love art for its own sake and all things that you need will be added to it."

"What place has criticism in our culture? I think that the first duty of an art critic is to hold his tongue at all times and upon all subjects. Don't take your critic as any sure test of art, for artists, like the Greek gods, are only revealed to one another."

The first laughter of the evening came when Wilde said, "Since you have all heard *Patience*, which has been given for so many nights, you might listen to me for at least one evening." And on the strength of this breaking of the ice, he added, "You must not judge our aestheticism by the satire of Mr. Gilbert any more than you can judge of the strength and splendor of the sun or sea by the dust that dances in the beam or the bubble that breaks upon the wave."

Then Oscar came to the sunflower and the lily, and smiling so broadly that his audience laughed and applauded, he said, "You have heard,





CLARA MORRIS AS "EVADNE"

*Photographed by Sarony.*

I think, a few of you, of two flowers called, erroneously, I assure you, the food of aesthetic young men. Well, let me tell you that the reason we love the lily and sunflower is not, in spite of what Mr. Gilbert may tell you, for any vegetable fashion at all. It is because these two lovely flowers are, in England, the two most perfect models of design. They are the most naturally adopted for decorative art. The gaudy leonine beauty of the one, the precious loveliness of the other, give to the artist the most nearly perfect joy."

As he went on, sentences clung to the memories of hearers: "Beauty is the only thing time cannot harm. . . . There can be no great sculpture, no great drama, without a noble national life; the commercial spirit of England has killed that." (Applause; some of it said to come from Irish spectators.) "Let there be no flower in your meadows that does not wreath its tendrils around your pillows, no curving spray of wild rose or briar that does not live forever in carven arch or window of marble."

The audience was growing restive; a large portion of it was bored. A few showed interest when Wilde spoke artful compliments.

"It is perhaps to you that we turn to perfect this great movement of ours. There is something Hellenic in your air, something that has a quicker breath of the joy and power of Elizabeth's England about it than our ancient civilization can give us. You are young. No hungry generations tread you down. . . . The past does not mock you with the ruins of a beauty the secret of whose creation you have lost. . . ."

By this time some of his patrons were departing. The rest broke in with applause for a flight of eloquence. Wilde finished with spirit, bowed, and walked off with the same long, deliberate strides that had brought him on. One observer noted that he blushed.

A little later he shouldered his way through a group of starers at the stage door and with friends took a carriage to the home of Mrs. John Mack, where a reception awaited him.

Mrs. Mack, who had met Oscar's mother in London, had spared no pains with the function. An elaborate supper was spread when, at 10:30, Oscar arrived with the Macks and Colonel and Mrs. Morse. With his hostess on his arm, he marched upstairs to the drawing-room while an orchestra played "God Save the Queen." Those of the guests who had not seen him before were now more surprised at his height and powerful structure than at his costume.

"Not as handsome as I've heard," a lady murmured.

"Hair too long," grumbled a man.

The *New York Herald* reported: "The respect which Mrs. Mack entertains for Lady Wilde, whom she had known in Europe, found renewed expression in the manner of her reception of 'Speranza's' gifted son. . . .

"Mrs. John Bigelow, who entertained the poet at dinner on Sunday evening, was the first to congratulate him on his success as a lecturer. Mr. Wilde showed remarkable self-possession. Scores upon scores of beautiful and elegantly dressed society belles crowded each other in their efforts to grasp his hand, and yet he met them all with a conventional welcome. Any ordinary young man would have been nervous from the outset.

"Mrs. Mack was assisted by her sister, Mrs. John Lillie, the author of *Prudence*, the first aesthetic novel," which had been sold to *Harper's Monthly*, with illustrations by Du Maurier.

There were no Astors present, but the list of guests, commencing with President and Mrs. Barnard of Columbia College, was important enough for the newspapers to name them at length.

That night William Henry Hurlbert, editor of Jay Gould's *New York World*, dined Wilde at the Merchants Club where among Whitneys and Schuylers and others, there glittered the diamonds and anecdotes of Uncle Sam Ward.

## 11

Wilde's maiden lecture had brought a full \$1,000 into the box-office, a very respectable amount indeed in the view of American lyceum managers. Only a few American lecturers—and they long-established idols like Robert G. Ingersoll, Henry Ward Beecher, John B. Gough, Wendell Phillips—could consistently beat that figure. D'Oyly Carte, it was said, had a sensational piece of property in the young lecturer. The national publicity had been tremendous. Reports of the affair were traveling by wire to every city in the country. Solemn reviewers and comic paragraphers were making their pens fly.

The *Chicago Tribune*: "Wilde is a twittering sparrow come to fill his maw with insects."

The *Cincinnati Commercial*: "If Mr. Wilde will leave the lilies and daffodils and come west to Cincinnati, we will undertake to show him how to deprive thirty hogs of their intestines in one minute."

The *Boston Transcript*:

A lily by the river's brim,  
An advertising dodge to him  
It was, and nothing more.

*The New York Herald*: "His real position is that of a penny Ruskin at the head of a band of so-called aesthetic enthusiasts. . . . The idea of an artistic mission is not a pretext, and Mr. Wilde, besides being in for a paying thing, evidently enjoys the attention he receives even if there is a managerial collar around his neck."

*The Cincinnati Enquirer*: George Alfred Townsend, pen-name "Gath," said: "The little jackals who make smart newspaper paragraphs about subjects they neither reverence or understand" should be silent. "The stranger among us is a young apostle of beauty against a decaying age of trade and swap."

*The Nation*: "Mr. Wilde is essentially a foreign product and can hardly succeed in this country. What he has to say is not new, and his extravagance is not extravagant enough to amuse the average American audience. His knee breeches and long hair are good as far as they go, but Bunthorne has really spoiled the public for Wilde."

*Chicago Daily News*: "Oscar has come in search of the secret of life. It is ten chances to one he will be in search of the secret of life along a lunch-route of his own discovery before long."

*Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: "Oscar Wilde is a success. He is no longer a human fifteen puzzle."

Readers knew what *Leslie's* meant. The fourteen-fifteen puzzle in which workers moved blocks about in a box until an apparently insoluble problem was solved, was a national rage.

## 12

Two days after the lecture, D'Oyly Carte came down the gangplank from the steamship *Servia*, to find newspapermen asking him about his "Bunthorne in the flesh."

"A clever young man," said the British impresario. "I don't think it was out of the way bringing him here. I think I shall take him around the country."

## 3

## AT WHITMAN'S FEET

SEABOARD curiosity as to Oscar Wilde had its first full satisfaction when the *Philadelphia Press* appeared on Tuesday, January 17th, for that newspaper had sent one of its best men to meet the lecturer in New York and to accompany him to the City of Brotherly Love. As an observer and reporter, the interviewer was clearly superior to any the New York newspapers had set upon the visiting Britisher. A vivid picture of Oscar, inside and out, was offered to those who read:

"As a Pennsylvania ferryboat swung into her slip at Jersey City at a few minutes before one o'clock yesterday afternoon, the crowd scattered about the dock exclaimed in subdued tones: 'There he is; see him, that's Oscar Wilde.' The tall figure of the apostle of aestheticism, clad in his olive-green overcoat with its otter trimmings, and with his large face brightened by a smile and framed in long brown locks, blown about by the wind, was a conspicuous figure as he stood in the very front of the crowd of passengers pressing against the gunwales of the boat.

"He had evidently been enjoying a breezy trip across the tawny Hudson, for his eye sparkled and his face was flushed with pleasure as, with a long stride which kept him far in advance even of the eager rush with which a New York crowd escapes from a ferry, and which left his valet struggling hopelessly in the rear with a burden of baggage, he entered the Pennsylvania station and passed to the waiting Philadelphia express. His sole companions were W. F. Morse, business manager for D'Oyly Carte, and a *Press* reporter.

"The party took seats in the smoking compartment of the Pullman car 'Jupiter,' and shrinking from curious eyes into a corner, Mr. Wilde alternately read *Fors Clavigera* and *The Poetry of Architecture* until the train had fairly started. Then, as he saw through the window the dismal marshes which skirt Jersey City, his eye became melancholy and he contemplatively puffed a cigarette. As the train sped on its way through New Jersey, he scanned the flitting landscape closely, sometimes smiling like a child at a glistening stream or a stretch of yet green meadow, and again seeming to find the sorrow of old age in the frequent

expanses of brown country and dripping black undergrowths made more dreary by the overcast sky.

"'I am very tired,' he said. 'I have been so kindly received in New York, and so cordially welcomed by so many lovely people that of course I wanted to see many of them before I went away. Was up late last night dining at Mrs. Paran Stevens's and afterward going to reception at Mr. S. L. M. Barlow's, and I was so late today that I had no time to breakfast. Then I have been kept so busy answering letters. Why, it is strange how people seem to think I have nothing to do but answer letters!'

"'This is your first railway ride in America, is it not?'

"'Yes, this is the first time I have ever been in an American railway car. We go so swift—must faster than in England. There are but a few fast trains there—the Edinburgh and Liverpool trains. And then there isn't any such comfort as this. There are but two or three cars like this' (indicating the sumptuous Pullman with a sweep of the arm) 'in the country. I hate to fly through a country at this rate. The only true way, you know, to see a country is to ride on horseback. I long to ride through New Mexico and Colorado and California. There are such beautiful flowers there, such quantities of lilies and, I am told, whole fields of sunflowers. Your climate is so much finer than that of England, so bright, so sunny, that your flowers are luxuriant,' said Mr. Wilde, with a polite disregard of the clouds, and with a delightful ignorance of how hothouses are robbed of their treasures to let him breathe an atmosphere of fragrance.

"'You have reason to be pleased with your reception in the United States?'

"'Oh, yes, indeed. Do you know, the night before I landed I was wondering how it would be—thinking of the cloud of misrepresentation that must have preceded me, and wondering whether the people would wait to know me for what I am. But a poet must be indifferent to blame, as he must be to praise. He deserves neither till long after he is dead. Not till then can he be judged. While one is living, one can only work for what is to be. Do you know'—his face lighting up with a sudden smile while his eyes roamed reflectively—'our people in England took the greatest interest in my coming to America?—no'—in reply to a suggestion by the reporter—'no, they did not regard it at all as an aesthetic mission to a barbarous clime, but our artists wish very much to have their ideas planted and growing in America.'

"'What are your plans for the development of aestheticism in America?'

"'It is impossible to define them yet. In this, my first lecture, which

I am now delivering, I endeavor to explain the *spirit* of our art theories. As for the particular form it may take, I must wait to tell that in a second lecture after I have become acquainted with the country, and have come to know something of its artistic materials and possibilities, and have learned to appreciate its national spirit. I must know something of your woods for ceilings, for example, and numberless things of that kind. Art must differ with place and people. What would be quite right in England might be quite wrong here. It is only the general principles that I can teach now; their definite application must come later.'

"Here the poet gazed thoughtfully out of the window, and the reporter suggested that his impressions of American scenery must be as yet very limited.

"'Yes,' was the reply, 'but I enjoy very much what I have seen. But one cannot expect color in winter, when everything is so drear and brown. How dreadful those marshes are this side of New York. What a pity! and how unnecessary. They might plant them with something; so many beautiful things will grow in a marsh. Why, they might have great fields of callas growing there! Do you understand my line for lilies, and roses, and sunflowers? No? Oh, don't you know, there is no flower so purely decorative as the sunflower. In the house it is perhaps too large and glaring. But how lovely a line of them are in a garden, against a wall, or massed in groups! Its form is perfect. See how it lends itself to design; how suggestive it is! So many beautiful, very beautiful wallpapers have been designed from the sunflower. . . .

"'And you have such beautiful lilies in America. I've seen a new one that we do not have in England, that star-shaped lily. I always loved lilies. At Oxford I kept my room filled with them, and I had a garden of them, where I used to work very often.

"Do you hope to teach the "common people," even the abjectly poor, to find these beauties, and by them to elevate their lives?"

"The two classes we must directly work upon are the handicraftsmen and the artists. As for the class between, the idle people, rich or poor, it is useless to go to them, and tell them, "You must do this, and you ought to do that." There must be a great mass of handicraft produced before you can hope to affect the masses. And the handicraftsmen must be directed by the artists; and the artists must be inspired with true designs. It is only through those classes we can work."

"Do you not hope to bring back picturesque dressing as one of the forms in which the spirit of your art will work itself out?"

"All that must take time. We have to move very carefully, you know. Prejudice cannot be carried by storm. And, by the way, one of

the most delightful things I find in America is meeting a people without prejudice—everywhere open to the truth. We have nothing like it in England. . . . *Patience*, by the way, has done our cause no harm. . . . I enjoyed it very much. The music is delightful, and that is certainly on our side, even if the words are not.' . . .

"I am charmed with American beauty. They possess a certain delicacy of outline surpassing English women. And there is a charm about this curve here," said Wilde, drawing his finger from cheek to chin, "that is peculiarly fascinating. But the color of English women is richer and warmer, I think. I saw Clara Morris on the stage in New York one evening, and I was as delighted with her as with Sarah Bernhardt, who had told me very much about her charm; and I have met many surpassingly beautiful young ladies since my arrival. Mrs. Langtry, I may tell you, is quite with me in all this movement. She has an artistic house, deserves all her reputation for beauty, and sympathizes thoroughly with the aesthetic school."

"What poet do you most admire in American literature?"

"I think that Walt Whitman and Emerson have given the world more than anyone else. I do so hope to meet Mr. Whitman. Perhaps he is not widely read in England, but England never appreciates a poet until he is dead," said Mr. Wilde with a trace of bitterness. "I admire him intensely—Dante Rossetti, Swinburne, William Morris and I often discuss him. There is something so Greek and sane about his poetry; it is so universal, so comprehensive. It has all the pantheism of Goethe and Schiller."

"Poets, you know, are always ahead of science; all the great discoveries of science have been stated before in poetry. So far as science comes in contact with our school, we love its practical side; but we think it absurd to seek to make the material include the spiritual, to make the body mean the soul, to say that one emotion is only a secretion of sugar, and another nothing but a contraction of the spine."

"Why does not science, instead of troubling itself about sunspots, which nobody ever saw, or, if they did, ought not to speak about?—why does not science busy itself with drainage and sanitary engineering? Why does it not clean the streets and free the rivers from pollution? Why, in England there is scarcely a river which at some point is not polluted; and the flowers are all withering on the banks!" And Mr. Wilde again lapsed into melancholy.

"At this point, the train reached Trenton, where Robert E. Winner joined the party, and the conversation became general. During the approach to Philadelphia, Mr. Wilde showed an eager interest in the many novel things he saw. He listened with wide-open eyes to an ex-

planation of a long train of oil cars, but did not say whether he found any beauty in them. A glimpse of Fairmount Park brought back his happy smile, and he was greatly pleased with the ride over the elevated tracks and with the Broad Street station. As his conspicuous figure walked through the waiting room, many a whispered comment flew about; but the Aesthete dived into a cab and was whirled quickly away to his quarters at the Aldine Hotel."

## 2

The rich men he had seen in New York, the factories and signs of industry beside the railroad tracks on the way to Philadelphia, the glimpses of the latter's huge industries, had all set Ruskin's theories about labor revolving again in Oscar Wilde's mind.

When a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter asked him, soon after his arrival, about the Aesthetes, he answered, "They believe that the people of the artisan class have toiled long enough on unloved labor amid unlovely, hard, repulsive surroundings. Hence you see the politico-economical importance of aesthetics. The toiling thousands of Great Britain are growing more and more dissatisfied every year with their dreary lives filled only with incessant, unattractive toil. . . . The problem of controlling them is only to be solved by making them happy in their labor."

Oscar had come to America more than twenty years late with his doctrine of the handicrafts. America was interested no longer in the workman who took raw materials and, with his own hands, brought forth a finished article. Piecework at machines, production in large, standardized quantities, swift, quick completion, were the new gods of industry. Grand Rapids, Michigan, was delivering in Scotland furniture at a price twenty-five per cent below that at which Scotch labor could produce it. Wages in America were one and a half times those of Scotland and England, twice those paid in Belgium, three times those of France and Germany.

Industry and invention, developing steadily in America through the 1840's and 1850's, had been suddenly, dramatically enthroned during the Civil War. Called upon all at once to demonstrate that a population with mechanical possibilities could defeat the purely agrarian population in the South, the Northern States had brought forth machines, factories, packing plants, railroads, inventions, business methods which had amazed not only themselves but Europe.

The war had meant the defeat of the States in the South; it had meant something more—the defeat of the agrarian civilization in the

West as well. It had defeated "The American Experiment," the system, the way of life which Thomas Jefferson, more than any other one man, had fathered in his country—the system of small units in farm and factory, of small parcels of wealth widely distributed, of self-sustaining farms and plantations where the handicrafts sufficed;



WINDOW-BAKING OF PANCAKES IS INTRODUCED TO  
NEW YORK CITY

*"A Free Lesson to Young Housekeepers. A Character Scene on a Fashionable Avenue."* "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," March 25, 1882.

the system of curtailing the growth of cities and of private fortunes wherever possible; the system ruled by the vote of farmers.

To win the war, the old civilization had seized with avidity the grain reaper and had discarded the cradle and the scythe, whose shapes had been pleasing to the user's eye; it had abandoned the spinning wheel and the hand loom in favor of the clothing mill; it had started the canning factory on its way toward surpassing the arts of the country housewife; it had built and concentrated shoe-factories which ruined the village cobblers whose carving and hammering had been interesting to watch; it had driven forge workers from their anvils and their admiring villagers to the factory, and it had begun to substitute factory designs for the inventions of farm-women in designs for quilts.

Factories had begun in the 1860's to take over the making of cheese and butter from the housewives, and now in 1882 artificial butter was a sensation—cheap, questioned, sneered at by the frightened farmers, applauded by the newly arrived immigrant laborers in the cities.

Penmanship, which had been so proud and so embellished an art—and craft—in the pre-war days, had been threatened since 1873 by the newfangled typewriter. Fireplaces which, for all their discomforts, had been delightful parts of farm life, had been disappearing before the air-heating stone. Printing plants had been cutting down the number of their workers, although the number of newspapers increased. Air-brakes, automatic couplers, were reducing the number of workmen per train. Machines now made baskets, and weavers were hunting other work. Portrait painters were frightened in 1882 by the news that George Eastman was perfecting a film which would increase the use of photographs. Illustrators shook their heads dismally that year to hear that progress was being made in laboratories where scientists worked on photoengraving and half-tone printing. Livery stable men, boastful of the form of horses, sleighs, carriages, buggies, were complaining that the new telephone, where it had been installed, cut down their business. Even the butcher, who had taken pride in his carving, was glowering at the packers who crowded him to the wall.

A man could now turn to a machine that would let him do in a day what it had taken twenty yesterdays to do with his hands, but in the victory he had sacrificed most if not all of whatever artistic pleasure he had taken in his work.

The economic ruin of the old civilization had been assured, during the Civil War, by the turn of politics.

Under the long rule of the Democracy through the dynasties of Jefferson and his follower, Jackson, the farm vote had ruled the Republic, checking the men who sought centralized banking control, denying them their hearts' desire, high tariffs and "sound" money. And even the newly formed Republican Party, taking the reins of government in 1861, had been full of the same ideas. But the war had forced the Republican Administration to turn to the financiers and to ask them for help, to beg them to expand industry, to lend money, to build railroads. Sufficient help had come, but at a price. The old Union was saved, but the old civilization was not. The farm vote emerged from the conflict split hopelessly into two hostile camps, the Southerners bitterly Democratic, the Northerners predominantly Republican—neither able to curb their ancient economic enemies, the financiers, who now held the balance of power. The money lenders had won the

things they had coveted so long, the laws and the authority which would let trade and business and finance flourish at will.

And in 1882 it was being revealed that they had won, during the war, still another victory, a constitutional amendment which gave unguessed powers to their new device, the corporation.

In the very year that Oscar Wilde discovered America, certain Americans were discovering how the Fourteenth Amendment, which had been passed in 1866, had been quietly designed to protect corporations as well as to accomplish its ostensible purpose, the guarantee of citizenship to the ex-slaves of the South. Roscoe Conkling, lately senator from New York, and now lawyer for the railroads, was arguing against the attempts of San Mateo County, California, to tax the Southern Pacific, when he disclosed that the Congressional drafters of the Fourteenth Amendment had intended to help their financial friends as much as the Negro. Conkling was sure, in 1882, as were most of the corporation lawyers, that the Supreme Court must decide in their favor and establish once and for all the principle that under the Constitution, a corporation, having the rights of an individual, could not be taxed to death by any State that might rise up in ancient agrarian wrath.

In the simplest physical sense, the rural civilization was also losing, for the industrial conquest of the nation had meant the turn to the city. Where only some twelve per cent of the population had, in 1850, lived in towns of more than 8,000, over sixteen per cent had lived so in 1860, more than twenty per cent in 1870, and, in 1880, even after a decade of hard times and labor strikes had sent throngs of city workers back to the farm, the percentage had climbed past twenty-two per cent. Now, in 1882, over one-fourth of all Americans were classed as urban.

A few observers were noting how all this political, economic and physical change was throwing a pall upon the spirit of the Jeffersonian American. His proverbial independence was beginning to weaken before the growing readiness of industrial and commercial employees to vote as their employers wished. Not even in the decade of the 1870's, when labor strikes had been many and vicious, had there been enough dissent on the part of wage-earners to dethrone the political rule desired by their employers.

### 3

The Knights of Labor had campaigned for State ownership of telegraphs and railroads, and for an eight-hour working day, but they had never gotten far, so well had the employers spread the propaganda that

the unrest was nothing but the mischievous nonsense of foreigners imbued with anarchy, communism and socialism from "decayed quarters of Europe." Laws against "labor conspiracies," judicial decisions against strikers, increases of city police forces, State militia, and armories all had come after the strikes of 1877.

While Adolph Strasser and Samuel Gompers, a cigar-maker, were worrying, in 1882, about funds for their embryo national federation of labor, uncounted Americans were reading the book, *Strikers, Communists and Detectives*, which Allan Pinkerton, the celebrated detective, had written:

"Ever since the great strikes of 1877, my agencies have been busily employed by great railway, manufacturing, and other corporations, for the purpose of bringing the leaders and instigators of the dark deeds of those days to the punishment they so richly deserve. Hundreds have been punished. Hundreds more will be punished."

America's change from the French republican ideas of agrarian or small-unit shops to new industrial-corporation ideas—which were at base the difference between pre-war and post-war America—was voiced well by Pinkerton, whose wealth had come by his amazingly efficient protection of the property of railroad and manufacturing magnates. The idea of the strike, he said, had come plainly enough from English factory workers, but the doctrine behind it all was European and "had found its way into England" with its motto, that Gallic revolutionary cry, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

And America, which in its pioneer and agrarian era, had looked to that same battle cry with particular fondness, feeling it an outgrowth of the French philosophy which had helped produce the American Declaration of Independence, was now in 1882 apparently agreeing with Allan Pinkerton that it was incompatible with the industrial age.

Pinkerton continued, "The real cause of the American strikes in 1877 began in France in 1871 during the sixty-seven-day reign of terror in Paris . . . the famous 'Red Days' . . . when the Commune butchered the Archbishop of Paris." The Internationale made up of Communists was, said he, responsible for the American trouble, and it was against its evil ways that he had got strike-breakers in 1877 to fight the walk-out and violence of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

In a nation where the businessman was dominant, Oscar Wilde's pleas for a Ruskinian Utopia were doomed to yawns, and his dreams of toilers happy in their labor certain to be regarded as ridiculous. The American industrialist, making money his goal and religion, could not or would not conceive that a laborer was interested in anything but

the same objective. Didn't the worker get higher wages than his brothers in Europe? That was all that mattered.

Wilde had come to America hoping to talk to the workingman, and he had found himself fenced off both by the indifference of the toiler and by the eagerness with which the rich and the society folk occupied a visiting aristocrat's time.

The Aesthete had come to preach handicraft arts to a people who regarded their own handicraft arts as tedious, boorish, and old-fashioned heirlooms unworthy to be compared with the new marvels of science, invention, and mechanism.

From the hour of his arrival there remained nothing for Oscar Wilde but to go on tour as a freak, a curiosity-man, a dilettante faddist who might amuse some idle, fashion-hungry women with his notions on clothes and household gewgaws.

## 4

Through the rest of the afternoon of his arrival in Philadelphia on that January 16th Oscar sat quietly in the Aldine Hotel. Then a few minutes before eight o'clock he was driven to the lavish and Gothic home of Robert Stewart Davis, at 1801 Spruce Street, where a reception for him was to be held. For days Davis, as a social and literary personage—and ex-editor of *Saturday Night* and owner of the brand-new magazine, *Our Continent*, which Albion W. Tourgee edited in New York—had been preparing for this event. Over three hundred invitations had been sent out, Davis aspiring to the hope that President Arthur himself would accept. Senators, congressmen, all the judges of the city and of the higher State benches, prominent members of the Penn, the University and Philadelphia Clubs, chief workers in the Social Art League, Mayor King—a throng of officials, had been summoned.

Few of the greater names were announced that evening, and next day the *Philadelphia Press* revealed that "some of the most distinguished of the invited guests were absent, and many old Philadelphians pronounced the reception in attendance, as rather tame. . . . Walt Whitman was not present." The *Press* man, however, did note Daniel Dougherty, that silver-tongued orator, ex-Mayor Stokley, J. B. Lippincott, the publisher, Judge Biddle, Professor Krauth, vice-provost of the University of Pennsylvania, Professor Coppee, famous historian of the University, Howard Roberts, the sculptor, ex-Governor Hartranft, Civil War general, J. G. Rosengarten and J. M. Stoddart, publisher of Wilde's own poems. In the library, upstairs, the ladies grouped themselves to be introduced to the poet, Kate Field and Louisa Chandler

Moulton, the authoress, among them. Downstairs, while Wilde was absent with the ladies, the male guests fell upon Davis's "magnificent supper" throughout the whole hour between nine and ten, and afterward many of them trailed along while Davis showed Wilde his art objects—"lambrequins of rare Japanese silk and mediated embroidery . . . a curiously woven mandarin's silk bed-quilt, saved from the sack of Pekin . . . a marble mantel flanked by Byzantine dragons and a bas-relief of Ferdinand, King of Navarre, welcoming the Princess of France."

The reporter heard that Wilde had "gazed yearningly on a piano cover which was a Persian rug of cloth of gold" and that he had "reposed for a moment in an elaborately carved Italian chair of Fernlini."

That Davis was not forgetting his magazine, whose first number was due in February, soon became evident. That initial issue contained two short poems by Oscar Wilde, "Le Jardin" and "La Mer."

The day after the reception Oscar lay back with his long cigarette, working on his lecture, while a Negro stood outside his door telling callers, "Massa Wilde is too busy to receipt today." Cards came in on a silver plate, but the autograph hunters and the bores were turned away.

Horticultural Hall, that remainder from the Centennial Exposition of 1876, was to be the scene of Wilde's second night of lecturing. Among its large rooms full of palms, cinnamon trees, yuccas, which stood among planted gardens in Fairmount Park, was a lecture room that was to be Oscar's theater, since the preferable Academy of Music was to be occupied that night of January 17th by grand opera.

The location was no disadvantage, however, for, as the *Press* noted, "more carriages with liveried footmen came to Horticultural Hall last evening than to the Academy of Music. Wilde's audience practically filled the hall . . . almost everybody who is anybody was present. . . . Wilde, in some mysterious way, for he did not appear to make any physical effort, reached one of the big black chairs (on the stage) and sank down in a drooping way against its uncompromising back." Colonel Morse introduced him and "the giggle which had greeted his entrance gave way to slight applause as he unrolled his manuscript. The audience listened at first with interest and then with sullen despair. . . . Mr. Wilde paused once and raised a goblet of water to his lips and as he placed it gracefully on the table, the audience gave him the most vigorous applause of the evening. The poet for a moment lost composure. His placid face flushed, but in a few minutes he was himself." As the mock applause died out, "the audience could be heard laughing."

The *Philadelphia Record*'s critic ridiculed the lecturer's dress, and his face—"a blank from which the ponderous jaw was grinding out

some dawdling chant." The patrons, the *Record* observed, had numbered 1,500, "mostly unenthusiastic." The *Press* guessed that at \$1 a ticket for the best seats, the proceeds were \$1,000.

Wilde was not happy during the address, and at a reception for him given immediately thereafter at the home of Stoddart, 107 North 19 Street, the poet told a *Press* reporter that he had been "dissatisfied with the treatment received at the lecture. My hearers were so cold I several times thought of stopping and saying, 'You don't like this, and there is no use of my going on.' "

Praise came however from the *Public Ledger*, edited by L. Clarke Davis, whose wife, Rebecca Harding Davis, was a prolific writer, whose son, Richard, was ambitious in that direction, and whose employer, George W. Childs, was, on the night of the 18th, to give Wilde a dinner in his home.

## 5

Next morning Wilde rose to find not only this mixture of praise and ridicule in the newspapers but sneers at the languid ladies who had pursued him, tales of the pasteboard sunflowers that were on sale, advertisements for Hecker's Buckwheat Cakes—"They satisfy the soul better than calla lilies or tall sunflowers"—and the quip, "Oscar Wilde always dresses in mourning out of respect for the memory of his wits."

Breakfast soothed whatever pain he felt, for it was a dignified affair at the home of Professor S. H. Grosse. Dougherty, and Rosengarten, whom he had met at the Davis reception, were present with friendly words. A half dozen other congenial persons of intellectual consequence were at the board.

The breakfast over, Wilde rose in his "usual morning dress of brown velvet and brown trousers of the ordinary cut" and started with Stoddart on what was the most memorable day of his American trip so far. First they must stop at the Woman's School of Design, where, as the newspapers soon learned, the poet "met the merriment of the unaesthetic maidens assembled" and where his green overcoat caused one of the girls to ask, "Does the color extend all the way through?"—a reference to the popular custom of pulling down a lower eyelid when guyed or stuffed by a prankster, and asking, "See anything green?" To be thought credulous or gullible was, in large cities, to be shamefully rural—green as grass.

Early in the afternoon Stoddart and Wilde, quietly dropping all other matters, disappeared in the direction of Camden, that dark town across the Delaware River where so many workingmen had their homes,

and to which Walt Whitman had come from Washington in 1873, after a paralytic stroke had partially disabled him. There in the new house which his brother George had built on Stevens Street, he had lived plainly, quietly fighting to recover his health, sitting month after month "watching the slow days pass, hearing from his open window the homesick roll of the trains which crossed fifty or sixty rods from his home."

Although his health had somewhat returned to him, Whitman was now sixty-three and knew that his great days were done—the days when he had roved and roamed as errand boy, schoolteacher, newspaper printer, reporter, editor, carpenter, hospital nurse during the Civil War, government clerk, poet, scribbler of random poems which had been collected at last into *Leaves of Grass*, that most disputed of American works since the 1850's.

*Leaves of Grass* had kept coming out in new editions every few years accompanied by cries of "Grossness," "Filth!" from the puritans. Other volumes had come from him, too, at long intervals—one, *Specimen Days and Collect* was due that year, 1882. Old beyond his years the bachelor sat thinking of democracy, of lilacs blooming, of Lincoln in his tomb, of sea birds singing of death, of the flight of time, of cradles endlessly rocking, of ax-men in the West—an American with America written on his white brow—a plain, rough-hewn genius of geniuses, he sat waiting in gray for a London boy in brown velvet to knock at his cottage door.

## 6

Philadelphia was not excited about the meeting; it cared little for either poet, particularly little about Whitman. His songs of pioneer democracy and of Manhattan prostitutes had offended the city's immeasurable complacency and its standards of what was genteel.

But next day, January 19th, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Press* came over the river to talk with Whitman, then to hurry back to his office and write:

"Oscar Wilde yesterday called upon Walt Whitman at his home in Camden, where he has lived for the past nine years, and the two poets discussed men and letters for nearly the entire afternoon. Remembering the value it would have been to the world now, had a record been made of Emerson's celebrated visit to Carlyle, a *Press* reporter last evening obtained Whitman's fresh impressions of the afternoon. The author of *Leaves of Grass*, although partly an invalid, makes long jaunts, and has returned from his recent trip to New England in more vigorous physical health than since his paralysis of 1873.



LILLIAN RUSSELL IN "PATIENCE"  
*Photograph from the Collection of J. H. James.*



"Yes, Mr. Wilde came to see me early this afternoon," said Walt, "and I took him up to my den where we had a jolly good time. I think he was glad to get away from lecturing, and fashionable society, and spend a time with an "old rough." We had a very happy time together. I think him genuine, honest, and manly. I was glad to have him with me, for his youthful health, enthusiasm, and buoyancy are refreshing. He was in his best mood, and I imagine that he laid aside any affectation he is said to have, and that I saw behind the scenes. He talked freely about the London literati and gave me many inside glimpses into the life and doings of Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Morris, Tennyson and Browning."

"Thus talking, Walt Whitman led the way to his 'den,' as he calls it, on the third floor. 'Wilde and I drank a bottle of wine downstairs,' he continued, 'and when we came up here, where we could be on "thee and thou" terms, one of the first things I said was that I should call him "Oscar." "I like that so much," he answered, laying his hand on my knee. He seemed to me like a great big, splendid boy,' said Whitman, stroking his silvery beard. 'He is so frank, and outspoken, and manly.

I don't see why such mocking things are written of him. He has the English society drawl, but his enunciation is better than I ever heard in a young Englishman or Irishman before. We talked here for two hours. I said to him: "Oscar, you must be thirsty. I'll make you some punch." "Yes, I am thirsty," he acknowledged, and I did make him a big glass of milk punch, and he tossed it off, and away he went.'

"During this communion the representative of the aesthetes expounded freely the theories and the intentions of his school, occasionally asking the old gray poet's opinions and views. The old man, however, evaded these inquiries with a smile. He said: 'I wish well to you, Oscar, and as to the aesthetes, I can only say that you are young and ardent,



#### A PRODUCT OF THE AGE OF INVENTION

*"Do you feel blue? Have you weakness of mind or body? Throw away drugs. Try Richardson's Magneto-Galvanic Battery." An advertisement in "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," March 5, 1881.*

and the field is wide, and if you want my advice, I say "go ahead." Mr. Wilde made friendly inquiries about Whitman's own theories, and the mode and origin of his peculiar work. While answering freely, Walt wound up this part of the conversation by saying that those were problems he himself was always seeking to solve.

"Wilde described himself as having absorbed the Whitmanesque poetry from boyhood. He said that Lady Wilde bought one of the earliest copies of the poems some sixteen years ago, and was accustomed to read passages from it to him. He also spoke of the Oxford boys taking the book with them and reading it in their rambles. Thus he declared to Whitman: 'I have come to you as to one with whom I have been acquainted almost from the cradle.' . . .

"Wilde brought many cordial messages from the poets of England to Whitman, and received many to take back. Not the least part of his visit, it may be noted, is the intertwining, which is becoming closer and closer every year through sympathy and personal knowledge, of representative citizens in each country. At one time, in their two hours' talk, Wilde broke out, 'I can't listen to anyone unless he attracts me by a charming style or by beauty of theme.'

"'Why, Oscar,' replied Whitman, 'it always seems to me that the fellow who makes a dead set at beauty by itself is in a bad way. My idea is that beauty is a result, not an abstraction.'

"'Yes,' was the quick response, 'I remember you have said, "All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain"; and, after all, I think so, too.' Later on Whitman asked, 'Are not you young fellows,' scanning stalwart Oscar's big proportions, 'going to shove the established idols aside, Tennyson and the rest?'

"'Not at all,' said Wilde, emphatically. 'His rank is too well fixed and we love him too much. But as for Tennyson, he has not allowed himself to be a part of the living world and of the great currents of interest and action. He is of priceless value, and yet he lives apart from his time. We, on the other hand, move in the very heart of today.'

"As for American poets, Mr. Whitman modestly acknowledged that Wilde had said many gushing things of himself, and had repeated the opinion he has more publicly expressed—'We in England think there are only two—Walt Whitman and Emerson.' Longfellow, he said, poet as he was, had contributed little to literature that might not have come just as well from European sources. Wilde also told Whitman that he was much impressed with the active life, the intelligence and the evident superiority of the masses of people in America, so far as he had seen them, over the common ranks in foreign countries.

"That's nothing new," said Whitman, patriotically; "but it shows that the young man has his eyes open." As the Aesthete departed, Mr. Whitman's farewell was, "Good-by, Oscar; God bless you."

"During the ride over from Camden, in company with J. M. Stoddart, the publisher, Oscar Wilde was very silent, and seemed deeply affected by the interview. He spoke admiringly of 'the grand old man,' and of his struggles and triumphs."

Long after he had left Philadelphia, the picture of Whitman clung to Wilde's mind—Shakespeare and Dante on a pine table beside "a simple cruse of water," newspaper clippings scattered about, an old arm-chair, a bed, fresh air, sunlight—and, through the window, "over the roofs of the houses opposite, the masts of ships in the river."

The scene was etched vividly on Stoddart's mind too. From him Morse heard how when Whitman's sister-in-law had brought out the bottle of elderberry wine, Wilde had downed "this not overpalatable drink as if it were the nectar of the gods" and how as they had left the house Stoddart had asked Oscar if it had not been hard to drink. Oscar had flashed back, "If it had been vinegar, I would have drunk it all the same, for I have an admiration for that man which I can hardly express."

Stoddart had heard Whitman explain to Wilde the secret of his "versification"; "Well, you know I was at one time of my life a compositor, and when a compositor gets to the end of his stick, he stops short and goes ahead on the next line."

Stoddart had seen Wilde sitting "on a little stool" at Whitman's feet.

There would remain but one thing in all America so to humble the young poet—the Rocky Mountains.

Within a few hours after quitting the plain quarters of Whitman, Wilde was sitting at the lavish table of an editor, financier and philanthropist who Philadelphia was sure would outlive Whitman in history—George W. Childs. The mansion was on Walnut Street, a famous edifice of white marble whose hall was lined with mahogany and satin-wood and decorated with plaques and vases of cloisonné. Wilde saw the great music-room with its organ, the library, upstairs, with its rare manuscripts—Poe's *Murders of the Rue Morgue*, Thackeray's *Four Georges* lectures—Byron's writing desk, a chair embroidered for Mr. Childs by the Duchess of Buckingham. All over the house Wilde saw clocks of all nations and sizes, striking the hour as nearly in unison as experts could make them. In the dining-room he saw china in fancy

cabinets, paintings, modern French bronzes. In the visitors' album beside great names in war, drama, statecraft, and art, Wilde dashed off an original verse, making Mrs. Childs happy.

But it was not the great Mr. Childs of whom Wilde would think when Philadelphia came to his mind hereafter. It was still that old and poor man who watched the masts over the rooftops.

During his stay in the Quaker City, Wilde accomplished an errand of kindness that had been on his mind. A friend of Oxford days, Rennell Rodd, had written some poems, and Wilde now insisted that his own publisher, Stoddart, bring them out. Stoddart agreed, and with Wilde discussed the format. Due more to Stoddart's notions than to Wilde's—as the publisher afterward confessed—the little volume appeared printed in brown ink on paper more historic than beautiful—paper from America's first mill, that of David Rittenhouse, and intended at that Revolutionary time for use as banknotes for the new government of the United States. Green Japanese tissues interleaved this stock, the artist-sculptor, J. E. Kelly, designed weird head- and tail-pieces, and Wilde wrote an introduction—a kind one.

Some 250 copies of the book were printed, and went on sale, to be more or less admired. But Rodd, when he saw the volume, was displeased. He wrote to Stoddart, "I find myself identified with much that I have no sympathy with." The dedication which Oscar had written himself, as everyone could see, was apparently too effusive. It read:

To  
OSCAR WILDE—  
"Heart's Brother"—

These few songs and many songs to come.

Rodd also wrote in displeasure to Oscar, and the latter was heard to say, as told by his friends, "What he says is like a poor little linnet's cry by the side of the road along which my immeasurable ambition is sweeping forward."

Another errand Wilde had in Philadelphia was to visit his cousin, Father Maturin, rector of St. Clement's Anglican Church. At the cleric's invitation to stay all night, Morse reported, Wilde hastily demurred, for he "had a glimpse of the austere and somewhat meager furnishings."

Oscar's Philadelphia visit must end. The *Press* on Tuesday, January 17th, had announced that on Thursday Wilde would leave with a party

of friends, including D'Oyly Carte, Helen Lenoir and Archibald Forbes, the noted war correspondent, for Baltimore, "where he will attend Forbes's lecture in the evening," then depart for Washington, where *The English Renaissance* was to have its third reading.

Himself a favorite of American society, Forbes had small sympathy with Wilde's ideas of reform. A bristling military figure, fond of coming upon platforms with his chest heavily medaled to recount his daring adventures in battle, he had no kinship with the languid, slouching poet who seemed so Socialistic and who said history was nothing but the chronicle of criminal wars.

## 4

### "TONGUELESS SILENCE . . . DREAMLESS DUST"

BEFORE his Baltimore audience, Archibald Forbes appeared on January 19th. It was a large and expectant crowd; doubly expectant because announcement had been made that Oscar Wilde would be present. There was neck-craning and whispering in the hall. Then there was disappointment. Oscar was not there.

Exactly what had happened was more clouded than cleared up by what people read in the newspapers. Colonel Morse wrote a smooth version of the affair, stating that "in speaking at Baltimore Mr. Forbes made some passing allusion to the coming of Mr. Wilde and his 'mission,' not intending anything more than a casual remark on what was then a popular topic of the day." This remark, said the Colonel, was maliciously passed along to Wilde in garbled form. And Oscar was miffed. Despite Colonel Morse's version, it was apparent that the insult had been given at a lecture prior to the one at Baltimore.

"He had a war of words with Forbes on the train between here and Philadelphia," reported on January 19th the Baltimore correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, "and when the train reached Baltimore, Wilde refused to get off and went on to Washington."

Both of the celebrities denied the story to a *New York Herald* man. Wilde admitted that he had encountered Forbes on the train between Philadelphia and Baltimore. The correspondent had two ladies with him. There were introductions and conversation. Then Forbes got off,

and Wilde went on, as he had planned. That was all, except that the poet had a nice letter from Forbes—which he refused to give out.

The hero of wars was interviewed at the Ebbitt House, Washington, as he puffed an after-dinner cigar. Was there a “miff”?

“Miff? I do not know the word. It is a trans-Atlantic word,” parried Forbes. He was friendly with Wilde, he purred, though he knew him only slightly. They met at the Philadelphia station. As a more experienced traveler he had asked Wilde if he could do anything for him. They had traveled together as far as Baltimore. That was all.

But what had Forbes said that could make trouble?

Why, nothing. The war correspondent repeated just what he had said in not only one lecture but several. He had told of a visit to the Czar in war-torn Bulgaria, and he had continued, “I glanced down at my clothes, which I had not changed for a fortnight, and in which I had ridden 150 miles. Now I wish it understood that I am a follower, an humble follower, of the aesthetic ecstasy, but I did not look much like an art object then. I did not have my dogskin knee breeches with me, nor my velvet coat, and my black silk stockings were full of holes. Neither was the wild, barren waste of Bulgaria congenial to the growth of sunflowers and lilies.”

All very good-natured, Forbes insisted; just a joke—“A man will do anything to get a laugh in a lecture.” He waved aside the suggestion that he had not wanted a bigger lion than himself at his show. “I got my fee; what do I care for attraction in America?”

Colonel Morse, however, knew that Wilde had thought the D’Oyly Carte managers should have made a public statement, placing the blame on negligence by the booking office in New York. “Wilde,” said the Colonel, “sent a letter to Mr. Forbes which created a state of things. Mr. Forbes demanded an apology, threatening to attack Wilde in the public prints and in person. Wilde was stubborn, angry and satirical, and refused to recede. Mr. Carte was in Florida; communication by wire was not easy. It took some active work, no little patience, a great deal of diplomatic persuasion, and a cable from Mr. George Lewis of London to calm the excited spirits and restore peace.”

Lewis finally cabled Forbes, “Like a good fellow, don’t attack Wilde.”

Knowing nothing of what Colonel Morse knew of the situation, the newspapers turned from it to a more sensational Wilde item—the reputed slight he had put upon the Charles Carrolls of Carrollton. From Baltimore came a despatch to the *New York Tribune*:

“Baltimore society is in a tumult of pathetic rage tonight [January 19th] over an unexpected, and what is regarded as a wholly inexcusable, insult offered by Oscar Wilde. In the first place Mr. Wilde accepted an invitation to be entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Carroll, descendants of Carroll of Carrollton, and all society was in a flutter of preparation. The Carroll mansion was magnificently decorated and every florist in town was depleted of his sunflowers and lilies. The guest was to come here to attend a lecture by Archibald Forbes, and the reception was to take place afterward. All the society people were at the lecture in full dress in anticipation of the reception to follow, and it was not until 8 p.m. that it became known that the poet actually was not in the city.

“His expectant hostess was compelled to send out messages revoking the invitations to the guests, but, of course, could not inform all. Several hundred gathered at the mansion, and when the truth was learned, several ladies who were to have entertained the poet next week revoked their invitations on the spot, and it is evident that Mr. Wilde will not be wined and dined here.

“It is learned that today he replied to an invitation from the Wednesday Club, the most fashionable organization in the city, which wished to entertain him, by a note stating that he charged \$300 for his presence at entertainments not held in private houses.

“Late tonight Wilde telegraphed his agent here to inform Mrs. Carroll that he was ill and could not attend the reception.”

Then the editorial writers got to work. The *New York Evening Post* declared:

“These occurrences are reported to have created a good deal of feeling in Baltimore, but we do not know why they should surprise anybody. Wilde is among us for business purposes. He must keep alive the interest in himself by new devices. . . .

And from Chicago, 900 miles away, Medill’s *Tribune* roared:

“The uncouth adventurer Mr. Oscar Wilde, who is visiting this country ostensibly as the apostle of aestheticism, whatever that mush conglomerate may mean, apparently does not count ordinary politeness as one of the attributes of his school.

“The practice of running after and playing the toady to every foreign adventurer who comes over here and is well advertised for some spice of immorality or extra development of ‘damphoolery’ has become so common and is carried to such a disgusting extent that some check is needed now and then.”

It was then that the alert *New York Herald* correspondent in Washington swung into action, coming up to Wilde, who had just reached

the capital, while the latter was eating oysters in Arlington House. Wilde said all the talk was invention:

"I have heard much about the character of American journalism in England. If you expect English gentlemen to come to your country, you must improve the character of your journalism. I do not intend to come to this city again until this sort of thing is changed."

He said that he had a slight acquaintance with Forbes, but there was no quarrel. When he got to Washington, Morse telegraphed him to come to Baltimore. That was the first he had known of the reception and he wired back, declining. He "never had heard of the club which was presumed to have invited me."

"I am glad the story did not come from New York," continued Oscar, "for I was quite charmed with New York and with its men and beautiful women. The city has a cosmopolitan air, quite like Paris or Vienna. [Elsewhere he called New York "one huge Whiteley's shop."]

"I have heard before I came here how low journalists ridiculed the art movement in England. I did not expect such vile things. It is quite too disgraceful. If you expect to have art in this country you must have good morals to back it. There are so many things worth thinking of and worth talking of that one hasn't time for such things.

"If I could live 10,000 years and my poems get me something like immortality—I might find time to write letters to editors and correct this thing."

He hadn't heard of the reception! Perhaps it was Colonel Morse who became mixed in his dates. In any event, though lacking time to write to editors, Wilde, when he eventually got to Baltimore, managed to identify the reporter who started the \$300 story, and asked him to come to see him.

"It was a young man of about my own age," Wilde afterward said. "I asked him what he was paid for the article."

"Six dollars," he replied.

"Well," said I, "the rate for lying is not very high in America. That's all I wished to ascertain. Good day."

Soon Baltimore's vexation died down. There was really more ado about a city ordinance restricting the driving of cattle along the business streets, and about the Fat Lady at the Dime Museum.

Before Wilde, lay Washington in all its winter beauty. Across its streets, here and there, lay circles, and through its parks wound paths that should have delighted his eye, for French architects, laying out



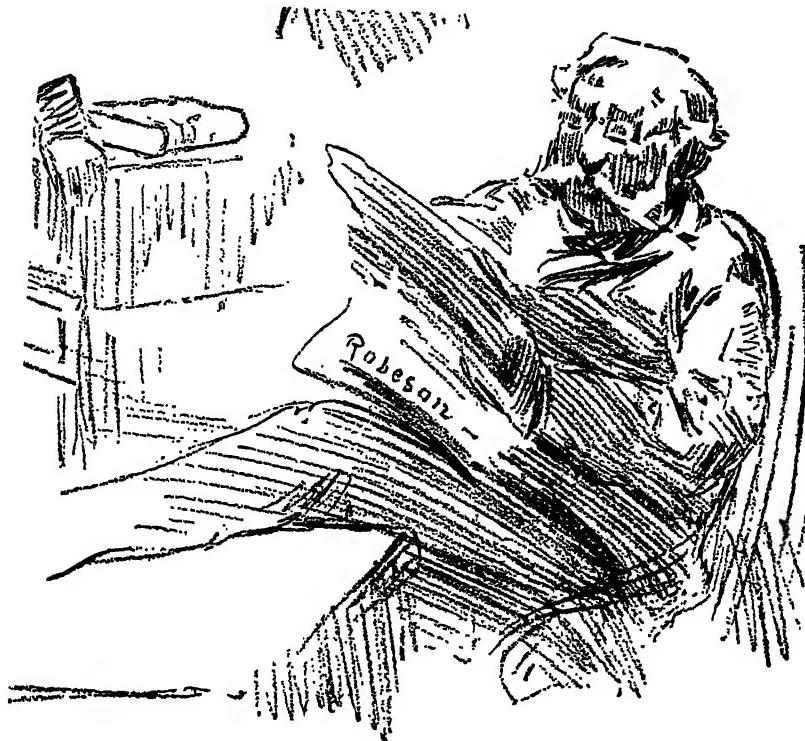
“THE AESTHETIC MONKEY”

*Engraved from a painting by W. H. Beard. “Harper’s Weekly,” January 28,  
1882.*



the capital, had applied artistic principles learned from the Greeks and the Orient—two civilizations often praised by British Aesthetes.

Englishmen had usually warmed to the city's aspects. Moreover, it was the metropolis of second social importance in America; Archibald



GEORGE M. ROBESON

*George M. Robeson, host to Oscar Wilde in Washington, D. C., as sketched in the House of Representatives by John W. Alexander. “Harper’s Weekly,” April 8, 1882.*

Forbes had praised “its tone of refinement” as being “incompatible with the echo of the clink of dollars.”

It was into the hands of a most socially inclined congressman, George Maxwell Robeson, that Wilde fell.

The wealthy Mr. Robeson, who, newspapers said, “looks like an English lord,” was a man much pointed out—and pointed at—around the capital, having been Secretary of the Navy in Grant’s two cabinets, and now a member of important committees and chairman of the Republican caucus.

So common were the reform newspapers' charges against his "notorious political antecedents" and his reputed guilt in having "defrauded the Government on naval contracts," that the *Boston Transcript*, when it heard how Robeson was sponsoring Oscar Wilde, declared, "It is a remarkable illustration of how shamming in literature graduates to humbug or something else in public affairs."

Still, as politicians went in this hour of swollen fortunes, laissez-faire, spoils, and intimacy between the makers and the users of protective tariffs, Robeson was by no means notorious, as his New Jersey constituents had shown by sending him to Congress even with the mud of Grant's lax Administration upon him.

Robeson, captivated by Wilde's humor, developed so sharp an appetite for aestheticism as to announce speedily that he would put gilded sunflowers on the lightning rods of the new house which he was building. Gladly he guided Oscar over the city, through the parks, past the endless statues of military heroes.

"Washington has too many bronze generals," Wilde thought, and jotted down the quip for future use.

## 4

In the capital Wilde heard on all sides tales of his New York friend, Sam Ward, for it was here that Uncle Sam had been one of the city's sights and nationally famous as "The King of the Lobby."

When Ward had returned from Central America in 1862 he had found the businessman, the banker, and the industrialist welcomed in the marble halls with a warmth never visible during the past generations of Democratic agrarian rule. The Administration was now, under the necessities of civil war, urging industry to expand, banks to buy bonds, capitalists to throw great railroads westward. It was showering business with subsidies, grants, favors, profits. The Union could not be saved without help from the financiers, and the financiers needed shrewd servants, men who would be half banker, half politician, to run between the counting-houses and Congress. The hour of the lobbyist had come.

Sam Ward had fitted into this niche quite readily. He had begun his new career as an official aide to the Comptroller of the United States Currency, Hugh McCulloch, the Indiana banker who needed help in handling Democratic representatives when they opposed the war and all that the war was doing to old American traditions. Around Washington it was understood that the Comptroller paid Sam \$12,000 and "dinner expenses" for the job.

Next, Washington heard that Sam was working for John Morrissey,

the New York gambling king. Morrissey wanted Congress to tax lotteries, knowing, as he did, that his competitors would be unable to survive the assessment while he could stand it and thus secure a monopoly.

Soon from Ward's home came tales of Lucullan feasts, and from his doors, late of evenings, emerged batches of bewildered representatives and senators to stagger down the street, feeling their paunches with pleased wonder. Morrissey in good time spread the word that he was satisfied and Ward's reputation was made. As “King of the Lobby” he began a career which was to last almost twenty years.

Just who his clients were was difficult to discover, for lobbying was necessarily secretive. On one of the few times that investigating committees caught him for quizzing, he admitted that he worked “sometimes for a railroad man wanting information, sometimes for a patentee wanting a patent renewed, or a broker wanting to know what the Treasury was going to do,” or sometimes “a banker anxious about the financial movements in Congress, or a merchant about the tariff.” He explained that, with Talleyrand, he believed that “diplomacy is assisted by good dinners. Dinners give a chance to ask a gentleman a civil question and to get a civil answer.”

Always he boasted that he would have no part of any fraud and that he had never given anyone a bribe. Washington correspondents suspected that this was true, for it was not in Uncle Sam to humiliate human beings. His art was to seduce men with epicurean food, exquisite wines, and enchanting conversation. He was fond of declaring that he had done great good during his long reign in Washington, cementing rickety friendships and ending fratricidal enmities among politicians. And particularly did he take pride in his necromancy with Generals Garfield and Schenck. They were bitter political foes and Sam invited each to dinner without letting the other suspect what was to come. Just as they met in his hallway and began exchanging glowers, Sam made his urbane entrance, and quickly got them to his ambrosial table where he held them with droll stories until his champagne had commenced to take hold. By the time the fourth course of viands was consumed, Garfield had begun to smile upon Schenck, and Schenck to beam upon Garfield. Late that night the two guests departed arm in arm leaving their hatchets buried deep under Sam's dinner débris.

“I'm the gastronomic pacifier,” Sam always said.

An investigating committeeman once asked him, “Is there not a great deal of money wasted on good dinners?”

“I do not think money is ever wasted on a good dinner,” was Ward's bland reply; “if a man dines badly he forgets his prayers going to bed, but if he dines well he feels like a saint.”

His greatest display of charm—his most famous *tour de force* in seduction—was in January, 1875, when he was called before the Ways and Means Committee of the House to explain what he had done to cause the Pacific Mail Corporation to list him as having received part of the immense sum—estimated at \$1,200,000—spent in getting a governmental subsidy for its steamers. Prosecutors charged that congressmen had been bribed wholesale, that influential editors had been given large “loans,” and altogether a scandal of note, even for that corrupt day, was breaking. Other lobbyists were trapped by the committee, exposed or forced to make shameful pretenses of forgetfulness; but not Uncle Sam. He stood at one end of the committee’s table, his eyes twinkling, his face beaming with good humor, and turned his own cross-examination into a humorous lecture, one that Mark Twain might have envied.

He admitted receiving \$3,500, but said he had not served the Pacific Mail for money. He had done it because “as an old Californian having sailed often on those steamers, I had a sort of friendship for them. . . . I wanted to see the American flag flying again on the seas.”

“State the nature of the services required of you,” persisted an examiner.

“Simply stating on all occasions when it was proper to do so that I was in favor of the measure,” said Uncle Sam, then before his enemies could pin him down to facts, he smiled confidentially and said, “This business of lobbying is as precarious as fishing in the Hebrides. You get all ready; your boats go out, suddenly there comes a storm, and away you are blown. I am not ashamed; I do not say that I am proud, but I am not at all ashamed of the occupation. It is a very useful one.” And he proceeded to explain how in England the lobby was a separate branch of the legal profession, one that helped Parliament understand what it was doing, and, he asked, was this not even more important in America where 4,000 bills came up at each session of Congress? It was hard work, he said, to lobby a bill through Congress, to see “that some members of the committee understand it,” to see that they did not oversleep on the morning a vote was to be taken, to coax clients to be patient, to keep braced for the unpredictable whims that rose in “the Adriatic of Congress,” and then, as likely as not, to have the bill flushed, like a bird, and quickly killed when your back was turned for just a minute.

The wheels of justice stood still while Uncle Sam rambled on. He ridiculed his own dinners, saying that when business was good they were good, and when business was bad they were meager. He made little money. Sometimes he had little to work with. This reminded him

of a story—the story of how a king of Spain stopping at a château in the far country found it empty of food yet capable of producing within an hour a delicious roast. The king asked how this was possible, and the cook said, “Your majesty, no animal contributed its life to your dinner.” From the window he showed his ruler fifty-two pigs running



#### UNCLE SAM WARD

*Sam Ward as caricatured in the “Daily Graphic,” New York, December 20, 1876, after his recital to the Congressional Committee of the tale of the King of Spain and the pigs’ ears. The cartoon pictures Ward, the lobbyist, cooking a meal for the seduction of Congressmen.*

around with their ears cut off. The king said, "A man who can make such a repast as that shall be made governor of a province."

With this graceful compliment to himself, Sam withdrew, the *New York Tribune* saying next day that the committeemen laughed so hard at his lecture that they missed getting any information about the Pacific Mail bribes. And the *New York Times* was so captivated by his testimony that it declared, "He does not grow rich by his trade; he never plays disreputable tricks . . . he has never corrupted morals. If ever a lobbyist goes to heaven it surely will be Uncle Sam."

"Although he lived by arts which nobody can respect," wrote an editor at another time, "he adorned a questionable life with amiability, refinement and breeding."

In the year before Oscar Wilde met him, Ward had retired from the capital, some observers thinking that he had left because President Garfield, having once sampled Sam's art, was fearful the old charmer would make him forgive all his enemies. At any rate Ward had moved to New York where, now in 1882, he was rapidly running through a large sum of money given him by his friend, James R. Keene, the Wall Street plunger. Once, years before, Sam had nursed Keene through a serious illness, and the financier, in gratitude, had privately bought a large block of Northern Pacific railroad stock, held it until it rose, then, when Sam needed it, had sold it and given the profits to his friend.

Washingtonians sorrowed after Sam Ward when he was gone, and none more earnestly than those same Congressional calves from the West which he had so often fattened and led to the abattoirs of the financiers.

## 5

In the Arlington Hotel where Morse had quartered him, Wilde found the dining-room full of citizens who had come for no other reason than to gaze upon him. "All sorts of stratetic movements were indulged in," wrote one reporter, "in the hope of seeing Oscar at his evening meal." On the very morning of his arrival, there had come twenty-seven letters begging autographs. Some of these he worked off quickly, inscribing his name in what reporters described as "a neat womanlike hand," on large cards of yellowish hue.

The newspapermen came to his room, noting very quickly a portrait of Walt Whitman on Wilde's table. "The simplest and strongest man I ever met," said the Britisher. "Eccentric? He is not. You cannot gauge great men by a foot rule."

One evening, soon after his arrival, and while he was dressing for dinner, there came to him a card which bore the name of a correspondent

surrounded by the titles of many Western newspapers. “I think there were eleven papers mentioned,” said Wilde in describing the adventure. “I was slightly flurried, as you may suppose. I said, ‘Now here is a man who molds the thoughts of the West. I must be on my best behavior.’

“In walked a boy, positively not more than sixteen years old.

“‘Have you been to school much?’ I asked.

“‘Oh, yes.’

“‘Have you learned French?’

“‘No.’

“Well, I told him that if he wished to be a journalist he should study French. Then I gave him a big orange and dismissed him. What he did with the orange I don’t know; he seemed pleased to get it.”

While the diplomatic set made nothing of Wilde—the British legation noticing him not at all—important American politicians began to send him invitations. Senator and Mrs. George H. Pendleton gave a reception which called forth many notables, for Pendleton, lately a Vice-Presidential nominee, and now sponsor of Civil Service reform, held power and respect.

Next day Washington was telling it that Wilde had said to his hostess, “You have no ruins, no natural curiosities, in this country.”

“No, but our ruins will come soon enough,” Mrs. Pendleton was reported to have answered, “and we *import* our curiosities.”

Wilde, when the story came to his ears, laughed it off, adding that it had been better told with Charles Dickens as the butt.

Mrs. Robeson, handsome, popular, ambitious, displayed in many quarters the lion her husband had caught: a weighty reception at the home of George Loring, the Massachusetts scientist, and now Commissioner of Agriculture; a lighter function at the smart Bachelors’ Club where, as reporters learned, Oscar had declined to take part in a german, saying, “I have dined, so I don’t dawnce. Those who dawnce don’t dine.”

A woman reporter for the *Washington Star* saw how Wilde, as he entered the club behind the red velvet skirts of Mrs. Robeson, came in on “thin crooked legs” trying to make “his eyes roll with poetic fervor.”

She saw him meet the Secretary of War, Robert Lincoln, only living son of the deified President, and saw him in a group with the fashionable daughter of General Grant, Nellie Sartoris.

Mrs. Robeson swirled Oscar to a meeting of the Literary Society at the home of Dr. S. M. Burnett, whose small, pretty wife, Frances Hodgson, was writing novels, and thinking about other novels for the future, children’s stories in which dress as fanciful as Oscar’s would have a place. Mrs. Burnett liked the elegant Britisher, and gave him a

reception at her home on I Street, Northwest. Her son Vivian thought it an agreeable afternoon, and timely too, since Washingtonians were already "swooning and Grecian-bending about and wearing sunflowers" in the aestheticism which had preceded Oscar across the Atlantic. Young Burnett saw his mother take Oscar to a corner and, laughing, wave other guests away with, "I can see the rest of you at other times."

Anecdotes of the visiting celebrity flew about a city which was always surfeited with celebrities. Oscar had called on Joseph Keifer, Speaker of the House of Representatives, sending his card up to the desk, and had received word in return that the Speaker would be glad to see him if he'd call at his apartment. Oscar was said to have demanded candles in place of gas at the Arlington, and to have announced he would write autographs for "beautiful young ladies only."

Observers thought Oscar did not see President Chester A. Arthur, nor James G. Blaine, "the plumed knight" of Republican politics, who, out of office now, was around the city making ready to run for the Presidency two years hence.

## 6

Some onlookers thought that Wilde must have met a Washingtonian more famous than even President Arthur—Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll—for, within a few days after leaving the capital, Wilde pronounced him "the most intelligent man in America."

But even if there had been no meeting between the two, there was such endless talk of Bob Ingersoll, so many printed copies of his lectures, so many anecdotes of his career, so many men and women who raved about him—pro or con—that any visitor could not but feel, soon enough, that he knew the man.

Right now, Wilde saw in the newspapers, Bob was defending men accused of defrauding the government in the Star Route Mail Case. And Ingersoll, who had moved to Washington five years before from his home in Peoria, Illinois, just to be near great cases like this, was to receive a huge fee from his clients. But Bob wouldn't save that money, he was too open-hearted, too generous, too impulsive. Why, the very preachers who called him "anti-Christ" and worse, couldn't resist his charm when they met him. The man had such love of humanity, such humor, and such a flow of language that juries, audiences, congregations—all the listeners at his endless speeches—melted in his hands.

He could get as high as \$4,000 a lecture, it was said. That sounded high, but all he had to do was announce a speech and the largest hall would be filled. He was laughing around Washington now because the



### "BOB" INGERSOLL

*Robert G. Ingersoll, defending politicians from charges of having defrauded the United States Government in the "Star Route" mail cases, counsels his clients not to fear the penitentiary, but to read his lecture on "There is no Hell." Thomas Nast's cartoon in "Harper's Weekly," May 6, 1882.*

Brooklyn preacher, De Witt Talmage, was denouncing him. For ten years orthodox clergymen had been maddened by his assaults upon the Bible as a thing "in conflict with itself, history, science and morals." In 1877 he had given in San Francisco the lecture that had infuriated the clerics the most, "The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child," an exposition of the old-time deism of Tom Paine, from whose *Age of Reason* he derived much of his philosophy. The "Man, Woman and Child" lecture had proved even more popular than his "Some Mistakes of Moses" and had made lecture engagements threaten his law practice.

Wilde would hear how masses of people cherished Ingersoll's assault upon the strictness of Calvinism in his "Man, Woman and Child" lecture and how he had described the torments of the old time Sabbath when all that a little child could do would be to go out into the garden and lean against a tree. . . .

"And there would be a bird on one of the boughs, singing and swinging and thinking about four little speckled eggs, the music in happy waves rippling out of its tiny throat, and the flowers blossoming, the air filled with perfume and the great white clouds floating in the sky, and the little boy would lean up against that tree and think about hell and the worm that never dies. . . .

"Think of such an infamous doctrine being taught to children.

"The laugh of a child will make the holiest day more sacred still. . . . Oh, Laughter, rose-lipped daughter of Joy, there are dimples enough in thy cheeks to catch and hold and glorify all the tears of grief."

Under the leadership of his tongue, as he harried the faithful, a veritable revival of the skepticism of eighteenth-century French philosophers had come upon the country by 1882. Agnosticism, it was called, and the fundamentalist clergy were storming, while certain onlookers were predicting that Ingersoll was the voice of a coming liberalization, if not depletion, of orthodox churches.

Deacons in good standing were known to laugh privately when they read how Ingersoll had said, "My advice to the clergy is, use assertion! Just say it is so and stick to it. If you explain the miracles of the Bible, the miracle is gone. If you fail to explain the miracle, you are gone."

Armies of the devout, for all their antipathy to him as a maker of infidels, could not stay away when he came to town for a political speech, or even for one of his lecture-assaults upon the Bible, the

clergy, or orthodox religion itself. They sat, laughing when he willed it, weeping when he wished it, and particularly did they feel tingling ecstasy whenever he came to the famous musical flight in his address “Man, Woman and Child”:

“A little while ago I stood by the grave of Napoleon—a magnificent tomb of gilt and gold fit almost for a dead deity—and gazed upon the sarcophagus of rare and nameless marble where rest at last the ashes of the restless man.”

In prose almost as poetic as Whitman’s, the voice rolled on to recite Bonaparte’s triumphs until the conqueror had come to St. Helena and had stood “gazing out upon the sad and solemn sea.” Then Ingersoll would grow solemn himself and describe all the widows and orphans Napoleon had made and—

“I would rather have been a peasant and wear wooden shoes. I’d rather have lived in a hut with grapes growing over the door, purple in the kisses of the autumn sun, and have sat with my children upon my knees—and have gone down to the tongueless silence of dreamless dust, than to have been Napoleon the Great.”

The Republican Party adored him, for his oratory had served it well, especially one day in Indianapolis in 1876 when to fellow veterans of the Union army he had explained why he was a Republican. It was, said he, “Because the man that assassinated Abraham Lincoln was a Democrat. . . . Soldiers, every scar you have on your heroic bodies was given by a Democrat. . . . Every man that wept over the corpse of slavery was a Democrat.”

And it was said that Democrats in the throng, knowing what bunccombe and falsehood this was, sat weeping as openly as James A. Garfield himself there in the front row when Ingersoll switched off into one of those lyric interludes:

“The past rises before me like a dream. Again we are in the great struggle for national life. We hear the music of boisterous drums, the silver voice of heroic bugles. . . . We see all the dead whose dust we have covered with flowers. We see them part with those they love. Kisses and tears, tears and kisses—divine mingling of agony and love. We see them all as they march proudly away under the flaunting flags, keeping time to the grand, wild music of war. We are at home when the news comes that they are dead. . . . They sleep beneath the shadows of clouds, careless alike of sunshine or of storm, each in the windowless Palace of Rest. . . . I have but one sentiment for soldiers living and dead; cheers for the living; tears for the dead.”

Of him Mark Twain wrote, “Lord, what an organ is human speech when played by a master.” And Beecher had said of him, “He is the

most brilliant speaker of the English language of all men on this globe."

Newspapermen fairly worshiped him, and learned to trail him if he started for a cemetery. His tributes over graves and coffins were not to be missed, and reporters taking them down, rushed them to the printers, secure in the knowledge that readers would discuss them more than anything that might be happening in Europe or the Senate.

Ingersoll's funeral orations had acquired tremendous fame as the result of publication on June 3, 1879, of his tribute to his dead brother, wherein he had said:

"Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unrepenting dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."

Only a few days before Wilde's arrival in Washington, reporters had followed Ingersoll in the rain to the burial of a child whose father, George O. Miller, a city detective, was a friend of the orator's. As the little casket had stood on the planks ready to go down into the grave, the undertaker had asked Ingersoll to speak. He had shaken his head. The sobs of the mourners were loud. Then he caught the appealing eye of the dead child's father, and stepping forward, with the rain falling on his face, he began to speak:

"We cannot tell, we do not know, which is the greater blessing—life or death. . . . We do not know whether the grave is the end of this life or the door of another, or whether the night here is not somewhere else a dawn. . . .

"Every cradle asks us 'Whence?' and every coffin 'Whither?'

"May be that death gives all there is of worth to life. If those we press and strain within our arms could never die, perhaps that love would wither from the earth. . . .

"And I had rather live and love where death is king than have eternal life where love is not. . . ."

Long before Ingersoll was done, the reporter noted that the sobbing had stopped and "eyes brightened, thrilled with awe."

Once more the agnostic had robbed death of its sting.

## 5

## THE TRIALS OF GUITEAU—AND OSCAR

WHILE champagne and truffles vanished down the throats of Washington's social set, the trial of Charles Guiteau was nearing its end.

As Wilde well knew by now, the President of the United States, James A. Garfield, had been shot by a crazy and disappointed office-seeker, the previous July—"shot," as sightseeing guides of the capital explained, "at the railroad station, in the ladies' waiting-room."

The President had not, as it sounded to some people, been prowling or peeping, he had been merely passing through the women's quarters, which had been fenced off for his official journey through the station.

Wounded, he had been thought in no great danger for a time, but as the summer of 1881 had worn on, he had faded until death came in September. The trial of his assassin had been a daily sensation of the profoundest sort ever since it had begun on November 14th, with defendant, attorneys, witnesses, spectators and the judge himself rivaling each other in antics.

Guiteau's sanity was the point at issue, for he admitted proudly enough that he had killed the President. God had directed him, he said, because God was much worried over the split that had come in the Republican Party as the result of President Garfield's quarrel with the Stalwart faction, headed by Senator Conkling of New York. Guiteau was proud that he was a Stalwart, and although he admitted his viewpoint might have been colored somewhat by the fact that he hadn't got the office he wanted, he insisted that the American public would and should bless him for having united the grand old party.

"The Deity furnished the money with which I bought the pistol," he boasted. "I was the agent!" In court he made matters very embarrassing for two professions, the doctors and the lawyers, for he was irrepressible, irreverent, and at times witty. Brushing aside his counsel every few minutes, he would bring up the matter of the medical care given the invalid President—care which press, public, and many on-looking physicians had criticized most sharply.

With cunning, Guiteau would say, "On July 25th, the physicians announced 'The President is not fatally shot!' My bullet was not fatal.

Garfield's death was caused by malpractice. I was only inspired to *shoot* the President. The doctors finished the work. . . . It is the Deity's act, not mine, and I expect that He can take care of it. He has taken care of it very well so far."

For weeks the courtroom and the nation had been at once horrified and highly entertained by Guiteau's descriptions of his career, of how he had been a member of the Oneida, N. Y., socialistic community, how he had practiced law, helping the evangelists, Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey, how he had once joined Beecher's church, how, as he said, "Ingersoll lectured that there was no hell and people came in crowds; I lectured that there was a hell and nobody wanted to hear me."

Frequently he would halt his attorney, Scoville, who had the disadvantage of being his brother-in-law, to say, "You talk and talk and you don't amount to a snap," then, turning to the courtroom, shout, "Scoville is making an ass of himself." He scolded the judge, mocked him, refused to answer his questions, shook his finger at him, and once, after a four-hour session, arose and adjourned court himself. Reveling in the press of the curious to see him, he autographed his photographs by the score, gave out interviews by the dozen, and when told to keep quiet by a marshal, roared, "Mind your own business! I know my rights."

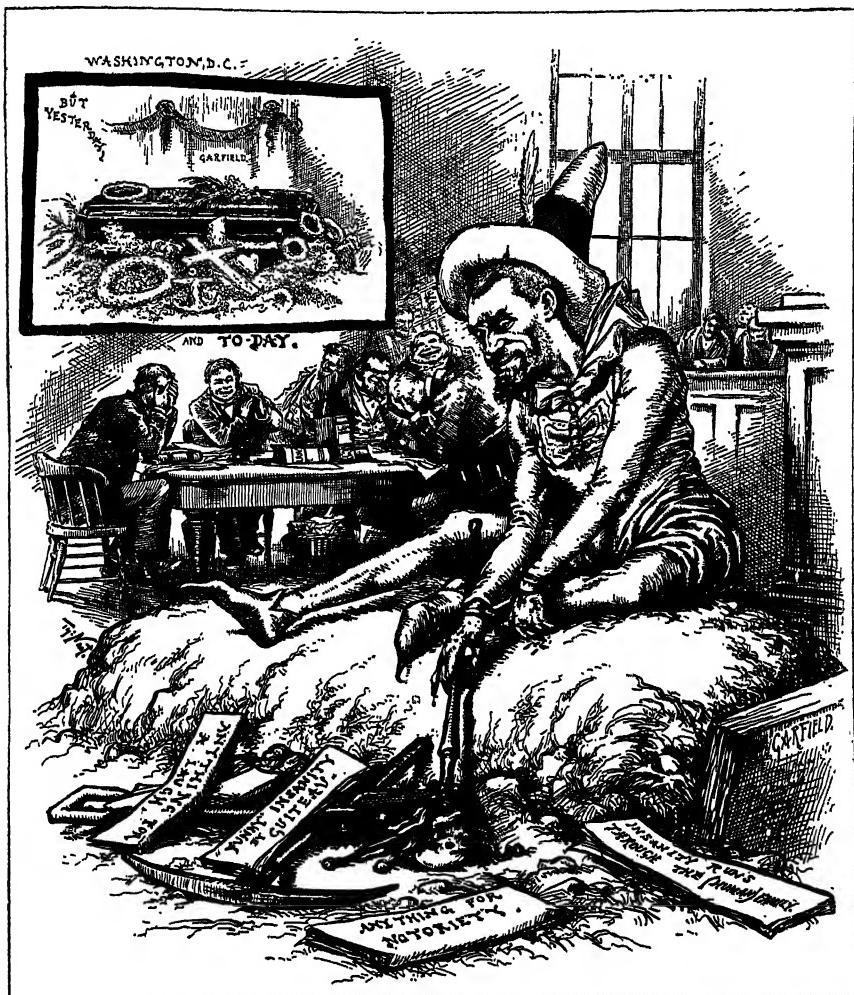
Once he halted the trial with the scream, "I have seven or eight hundred letters from sympathizers, many from ladies, expressing their sympathies and prayers for my acquittal." Observers thought this quite likely true, for women did mob him with morbid sympathy. Some of them thought him brave indeed when he called the judge an out-and-out liar and screeched, "It's an outrage! God will curse you if you hurt a hair of my head." On New Year's Day over two hundred persons, mostly women, had responded to his invitation to the public to pay him a call.

He quoted a poem to the court, a poem sent him by an admirer:

We hope that your hour of freedom is near,  
For your stainless acquittal we heartily pray.  
God has confirmed the act. . . .  
Beware, ye Americans!

Nightly he was taken from the courtroom in an iron van, heavily guarded, to prison in the malarial swamps along the Potomac River. In the long, low whitewashed building on that desolate spot, he was guarded by forty soldiers, all of whom were described as ready "to shoot the assassin if it were not for the violation of their sworn obligation to the United States."

Guiteau was fond of describing the several attempts that cracked patriots made to murder him. A Sergeant Mason had taken a shot at him through the window of his cell, and the bullet, according to the tale told over the town, had flattened into "a striking profile of the wretch as he looked when frightened." Facsimiles of the bullet were made and distributed among museums. On another occasion a horseman had



## “FROM GRAVE TO GAY”

*"From Grave to Gay."* Thomas Nast's denunciation of Guiteau's "feigned" madness and the scarcely concealed mirth of his cynical lawyers. *"Harper's Weekly," December 10, 1881.*

spurred alongside the armored carriage which bore Guiteau to and fro, and had fired a pistol at him.

The assassin had been, of late, considering the probability of his execution. The jury looked as if they would vote "Death." From a Philadelphia manufacturer of refrigerator cars, Mr. J. H. Ridgway, had come the proposition to take Guiteau's body, if he should be hanged, and exhibit it over the country, beautifully frozen, with Guiteau's heirs receiving half the proceeds.

Ridgway, when reporters scouted the possibility of so difficult an example of the embalmer's art, was answering, "Nonsense," and bragging that he had done better than that with some fish for the Government.

Guiteau wrote Ridgway that he liked his proposition but that it must be taken up through his lawyer.

## 2

Oscar Wilde had no time to spend studying the horror and flippancy of the Guiteau case. He had something of the kind on his own hands.

On Sunday, the 22nd, the day before he was to lecture, his eye caught a drawing of himself in the *Washington Post*, and above it one of the Wild Man of Borneo, while a caption asked, "How far is it from this to this?" Oscar's eye read, beneath the pictures that "the citizen of Borneo was also Wild, and judging from the resemblance in feature, pose and occupation, undoubtedly akin. . . . Are we not tending down the hill to the aboriginal starting point again? Certainly a more inane object than Mr. Wilde, of England, has never challenged our attention. . . . Mr. Wild of Borneo doesn't lecture, however, and that much should be remembered to his credit."

Some readers saw no reason for this attack except the ambition of the *Post* to enliven its Sunday edition, the only one in the city. Stetson Hutchins had come from Iowa, five years before, to launch the newspaper and now had sharp-penned August C. Buell as chief editorial writer, and Colonel John A. Cockerill, graduate of the slam-bang school of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, as managing editor. Cockerill was the kind of editor who would shoot and kill a man who grew abusive in making complaints about libel.

Colonel Morse, breaking the habits of a showman skilled in soothing the press, wrote a letter of protest which the newspaper published on Tuesday, the 24th. Morse denounced the pictures and article as "a senseless exhibition of gratuitous malice" and, although it was always legitimate to criticize a lecturer after he had lectured, "an attempt like



### GUITEAU SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS

A courtroom sketch of Guiteau signing autographs at his trial. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," February 4, 1882.

this to prejudice without the shadow of a reason, in advance, well merits and will receive the condemnation of all who can comprehend that bad judgment and ill taste don't improve the columns of any reputable paper."

The Colonel's flare-up did Oscar's cause no good, for in the same column in which it was published, came the *Post's* reply:

"If we could be brought by Mr. Morse, or Mr. Carte, or Mr. Wild with an *e*, to believe that we had done Mr. Wilde an injustice by publishing his picture in conjunction with that of his relative from Borneo, who is Wilde without an *e*, we would be quick to make reparation. But neither of these gentlemen have given us a living reason. The picture we published of Mr. Wilde—always with an *e*—is confessed to be genuine and realistically truthful. It is quite possible, however, that we may have done an injustice to the Borneo chap. His friends have not yet been heard from."

It was fitting, continued the editor, that an advertisement of Lydia Pinkham's face and medicine had appeared on the same page with Oscar's portrait, and if Morse's anger was justified, "what might not Mr. Pinkham have to upbraid us for? The possibility that there is not such a person as Mr. Pinkham is the only weak thing about this portion of the argument. . . . Nature never makes a mistake. She sometimes allows a Western road-agent to masquerade in the benevolent features of a Methodist circuit-rider, but she never puts the brains of a man of mental brawn and vigor into the cavity faced by such a physiognomy as that of Oscar Wilde's."

The *Post* concluded its attack by predicting that Wilde would exert no influence whatsoever upon America.

To the paper's critic who had attended Wilde's lecture in Lincoln Hall the night before, the Aesthete's talk had been "severely commonplace and kaleidoscopic." The audience, which was "politely aesthetic," had applauded when Wilde spoke of Whitman and Poe; it had been attentive at first, but soon "opera glasses were directed to all parts of the hall except the stage, ladies yawned" and "at last many arose and left."

Crosby S. Noyes's *Star* told its readers Wilde seemed to have "the attitude of an idle street boy watching a procession, falling in with the crowd. He has little or nothing worth saying; no mission."

Deeply as Oscar might believe that bad publicity was better than none, he smarted under the Washington barrage. The powers of journal-

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## HOW FAR IS IT FROM



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"We present in close juxtaposition the pictures of Mr. Wilde of England and a citizen of Borneo, who, so far as we have any record of him, is also Wild, and judging from the resemblance in feature, pose and occupation, undoubtedly akin. If Mr. Darwin is right in his theory, has not the climax of evolution been reached and are we not treading down the hill toward

the aboriginal starting point again? Certainly, a more execrable object than Mr. Wilde, of England, has never challenged our attention, whose picture, as given herewith is a scrupulously correct copy of a photograph put out with his sanction and which may be seen in all public windows. Mr. Wild of Borneo, doesn't lecture, however, and that much should be remembered to his credit."

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## MR. WILD OF BORNEO

The "Washington Post," January 22, 1882, compares Oscar Wilde to "The Wild Man of Borneo."

Could an Oscar Wilde jog from its self-satisfaction the city which sat among its historic shrines, thinking upon the countless benefits it had conferred upon the Republic? Bostonians, as a newspaper writer was observing, "have a good many isms and a good many peculiarities, and the city has been growing more and more aesthetic, but the peculiar London aesthetic craze has not yet struck the city. He [Wilde] will have to tone down his aesthetic notions."

Many Americans, reading this, could remember when no reformer, even a reformer in dress, would have been in any need whatever of toning down his notions. Less than twenty years before, Boston had still held its proud post as matrix of American reform, mother of agitation in morals, education, politics.

For more than a generation prior to the Civil War, Boston had fomented and preached anti-slavery reform with a vitality so fierce, so sustained, that it had bred a race of zealots eager to attack other national problems as well. But three years, now, in his Boston grave was William Lloyd Garrison, whose journal, *The Liberator*, had cried on the uncompromising moral war against slavery in the Southern States, and whose policy of splitting the Union rather than live under the same flag with the "enchainers of human chattels" had done so much to make the armed conflict irrepressible.

In Boston still stood the pulpits which William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and other evangelists scarcely less famous, had thumped like drums, while they summoned the Northern people to the great crusade against slavery.

Near Boston, John Greenleaf Whittier, in his seventy-sixth year, could be seen still writing steadily, outwardly vigorous yet not so white-hot of spirit as when his poems about the wretched bondsmen had flown across the country to kindle new fires wherever they alighted. With no power but his pen, he had made and unmade governors, congressmen, and senators, it was said. Powerful, invulnerable, because he wanted nothing for himself, he was, in the words of that authority, James G. Blaine, "the greatest politician I ever saw."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, though too philosophic to be called a reformer, had given prestige and ammunition to most neighboring reformers, was still living, although his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes was lamenting, "Emerson is fading out like a photograph." Holmes himself, scarcely less famous in England than America, was giving up his medical lectures, and was contenting himself with wit, geniality, and

memories of the old Saturday Club, where in Boston's heyday, talk had been so memorable.

Wilde would meet in Boston the most celebrated of the Abolition-reform lecturers, Wendell Phillips, now seventy-one. In Boston was still to be seen Bronson Alcott, one of the Transcendentalists, that



#### "BOSTON AESTHETICISM VERSUS OSCAR WILDE"

*"The Old Lady of Beacon Hill: 'No, Sir. Shoddy New York may receive you with open arms, but we have an Aestheticism of our own.'"*

*"Daily Graphic," New York, January 19, 1882.*

famous cult which sought the better life by community labor, simple life, and high thinking about God and morals. Out at Concord, Alcott was still lecturing, still working on a curious fence of interlaced boughs, and was praising his daughter, Louisa, who wrote such popular books for children.

Of the pre-war reformers—those relics of another civilization—the most active was Thomas Wentworth Higginson, taking out, now, in zeal for temperance, and woman suffrage the passions he had once had for emancipating Negroes. "Intrepid iconoclast of intrenched abuses," he had been called by William Winter, the New York drama critic, and in abolitionist days he had caught a fearsome blow upon the chin while battering down a courthouse door to rescue a fugitive slave from captors.

Twice Higginson had gone to "Bleeding Kansas" in the 1850's to help the fanatic John Brown fight slavery, and he had earned his title of "Colonel" by leading a black regiment in the Civil War. Twice married, once pastor of "The Free Church of Worcester," a tireless writer of essays, biographies, editorials, histories, a frequent visitor to Europe, a recent member of the Massachusetts Legislature, he was, in 1882, viewing himself as like a certain horse "which had never won a race, but which had gained second place in more races than any other horse in America." A lover of poetry, he was expected by some people to be ready to welcome the young British poet, Wilde.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, most popular of all the Boston school, was at seventy-five nearing his end. Everybody said so, looking at the minute lines forming behind the great white cloud of his hair and whiskers. The publishers who had risen with the Boston authors, the astute, ever-helpful Ticknor and Fields, were dead.

## 3

Two Boston women who were on the list of persons visiting Britishers usually wished to see, were Julia Ward Howe, that sister of Wilde's New York friend Sam Ward, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who at seventy and over was living comfortably at Hartford, close at hand, her income still ample as the result of a novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published exactly thirty years before when she had come from out of the West to dwell in the country's Athens. Secure now in the abiding belief that God Almighty had written the book with which she had done so much to provoke the Civil War, Mrs. Stowe would be no one to come running to greet an English author. Boston people told how she had talked so much at a reception to the British actress, Fanny Kemble,

that she had not met her at all. "But didn't you ask to be presented?" friends asked Mrs. Stowe, and received the blissfully innocent answer, "I should think she would have asked to be presented to *me*."

Around the feet of the dying demigods were clustering younger men who neither in number nor talent showed signs of carrying on the great tradition. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who, the year before, had become editor of that literary arbiter, the *Atlantic Monthly*, was, like Higginson, typical of the Brahminism that had settled on Boston once the bonfire of the abolition crusade had burned itself out. For when the Civil War had ended in 1865 with the freedom of the Negro assured, the creative impulse in Boston had begun to wane. The city had, with each succeeding year, become a little more dogmatic, philosophic, aloof, critical. It handed down judgments on art, literature, education—Harvard University near by was regarded as its own—and it had become the paradise of the academicians.

Two dynamic forces in literature were left to Boston as Wilde entered it, and it would be these two of all American novelists whom he would most admire—William Dean Howells and Henry James, Jr. Neither was wearing, however, the Boston stamp, the one having come from the West and the other already half transplanted in England.

## 4

No, Wilde would hear, Boston writers weren't what they had been. Talk of a new thing, "realism," had been rising since the early 1870's—a thin stream of talk, and it was a realism that was to be tolerated only when cloaked in humor. The funny men of the Civil War period, Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings, had written in what was accepted as the homely Western vernacular and frontier viewpoint. After them had come less farcical but nonetheless humorously disposed writers to handle subjects national in character—Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Edward Eggleston, John Hay—all rising in the 1870's.

And as Wilde entered Boston, a bibulous young poet of Indiana, James Whitcomb Riley, was being described by rural admirers as just as good as Longfellow, although their quotations from him were his humorous verses. Aldrich, the critic, was sitting, meanwhile, in a *sitz bath* of Boston Brahminism tepid enough to make him pronounce Riley "merely a vulgarizer of the English language." Will Carleton's *Farm Ballads* (an enlarged edition was due in 1882) had for years pleased masses who accepted them as comic and pathetic portraits of "the plain people," although literary critics were pointing out Carleton's blatant sentimentality and shallowness.



"INNOCENCE ABROAD (IN SEARCH OF A COPYRIGHT)."

Thomas Nast in "Harper's Weekly," January 21, 1882, pictures Mark Twain as a Bunthorne dreamer, because Clemens was conducting a strenuous campaign for international copyrights.

For its love stories America was demanding heroes and heroines of wealth and society; aristocracy was one with romance; envy of the new-rich was keen. But the independent artists among the writers were turning to the midlands and the frontier for their subjects.

Men who knew Boston told visitors that it held but one woman who was a genuine survival of the old crusading days. This was Lucy Stone, and her organization, The Massachusetts Suffrage Association, was now convening in the city with her as speaker. Along with her two wheel-horses, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she had learned the reformer's trade in the Anti-Slavery movement. All three women, large-hearted, hard-headed, zealous, had been taught the agitator's tricks by William Lloyd Garrison.

Oscar Wilde could have read in *The Nation* of February 23rd: "Abolitionists, it is universally allowed, have paved the way for the woman's rights movement and furnished gratis the methods of agitation."

A Massachusetts girl, Lucy Stone had gone to college to find out if it was true, as men said, that Greek and Hebrew gospels forbade females equal rights with men. Mastering the original languages, she had decided that the men were wrong, had gone to teaching school, hiring out, soon after, as lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Up and down New England she had gone posting her own handbills, taking tickets at the door, delivering speeches, and putting out the lights when her crowds were gone. Whenever necessary she had defied hoodlums who mobbed "nigger-lovers," and she had been perfectly free about injecting women's rights into Abolition speeches. She had let her property be sold for taxes as a protest against her inability to vote, and had, in 1869, when the Abolitionists' work was finished, joined with those other unemployed agitators, Garrison, Mary Livermore, Colonel Higginson, and Julia Ward Howe to organize the American Woman's Suffrage Association. As editor of *The Woman's Journal*, organ of the Association, she had as assistant-editors her daughter and her husband, Henry B. Blackwell.

Yes, Wilde would be told, Lucy Stone had kept her own name after marriage; that was part of her faith as to what the rights of woman-kind really were. When she and Blackwell had decided to wed, they had found no preacher who would pronounce the rites with the word "obey" left out. When an obliging dominie had been found, he proved to be Colonel Higginson himself.

Now at the height of the lecture season, Wilde would likely miss both Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Stanton, for they were indefatigable speakers, and thought nothing of arriving at backwoods stations on dawn trains.

Miss Anthony, although reared in Rochester, New York, by a Hicksite Quaker father who worshiped outside the Puritan tradition, had been born in Boston, and had become an Abolition exhorter at almost the same time—the early 1850's—that she had taken up woman's rights. In 1872 she had cast a vote to test the rights of her sex under the recently passed Fourteenth Amendment which gave civil liberties to Negroes, and her subsequent arrest at the hands of perplexed officers had given her the very satisfactory emotions of a martyr.

Mrs. Stanton had come to Boston from the West in 1846 to be kindled by Garrison and Theodore Parker into zeal for Abolition, temperance, suffrage, universal peace, and liberalized divorce laws. When not delivering speeches she was usually busy opening or shutting windows in railroad trains. With Miss Anthony she had, in May, 1881, published the first volume of their *History of Woman's Suffrage*, and now she was preparing to invade England with her crusade when autumn came.

While it would not be until he reached Ohio and Maine that Wilde could see the great hot-beds of temperance reform, he could see the anti-tobacco crusade active in New England. The Legislature of Connecticut, so near Massachusetts, was debating a bill to prohibit smoking in the State Capitol, one of the protagonists explaining how he had recently come to the hall of solons for his first day's session, and had gone home to be greeted by his wife's disgusted cry, "Why, Charles, you've been smoking!"

He said that it had been only with greatest difficulty that he had been able to convince his wife—if indeed she was convinced—that he was still a virgin as to tobacco, and that what she smelt was only the smoke of his colleagues' cigars. He was going to vote "Aye" when the bill came up, and he didn't care who knew it.

Anti-nicotine organizations were pressing upon publishers of schoolbooks the necessity for putting the damning truths about tobacco into physiologies. Temperance tracts had, in the past decade, been expanded to include warnings against tobacco. Julia Colman's *Catechism on Alcohol and Tobacco* contained in its 1882 edition pregnant questions

and pithy answers for teacher and pupil to employ in Sunday School or in meetings of juvenile temperance workers:

*Question:* What is tobacco made for?



### THE SERPENT CIGARETTE

*An anti-cigarette cartoon originally published in "Punch," September 23, 1882, and reproduced in American periodicals.*

*Answer:* If I do not know what tobacco is made for, that is no reason why I should eat it.

*Question:* How much is spent in this country for tobacco?

*Answer:* It is estimated at \$80,000,000 a year or more.

*Question:* How did men come to use it in the first place?

*Answer:* They saw the Indians use it.

*Question:* A very poor reason, but what can we do about it?

*Answer:* The boys can do some good by learning all they can about the mischief it does, so that they will never wish to use it.

*Question:* What are the most common injuries done by the use of tobacco?

*Answer:* It first affects the nerves and often brings on neuralgia and paralysis.

*The Primer of Politeness*, a handbook for the young, was enjoining readers to remember that anyone who, at the age of twenty, smoked eight cigars a week at ten cents each would by the time he was sixty have wasted \$8,311. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it" was the *Primer's* triumphant moral without explaining the rate of compound interest by which the gigantic saving might have been accomplished.

## 6

Already Wilde knew how other cities made up and repeated folk-jokes about Boston, about how its housewives were so frugal they borrowed creamery butter and repaid in oleomargarine, and how the streets were so narrow and crooked as to make it dangerous to everybody's eyes for anybody to carry a cane or umbrella under his arm, and how a religious fanatic had stopped Emerson and Parker on the street to warn them, "The world ends tonight!" and how Emerson had replied, "I can get along without it"; and Parker had yawned, "I am not concerned; I live in Boston."

Wilde would be told that self-satisfaction had taken the vitality out of New England religion; no new movements were developing—none of the curious, stormy sects that had been so many and so alive in other days. Of course there were minor sputterings, left-overs from the era of great explosions. Mr. Wilde would see freakish aftermaths of the philosophic thinking Boston had once done, buildings with "Vibration of Life" and the like lettered over their doors. But no new religions or sects would come out of Boston to sweep across the country and set millions alight with a fresh faith. Everybody agreed to that.

Mr. Wilde might be interested in a thing that had just happened over in Lynn, a thing that was pointed out as an example of how weak the yeast of religious fermentation had grown.

Over there a woman named Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy had published a book in 1875 that had caused a little local talk. *Science and Health* she had called it, teaching how the former when applied to the mind could help the latter. She had printed but 1,000 copies of it, and, in 1878, a second edition of only two hundred more. Mental healing was not a new subject around Boston.

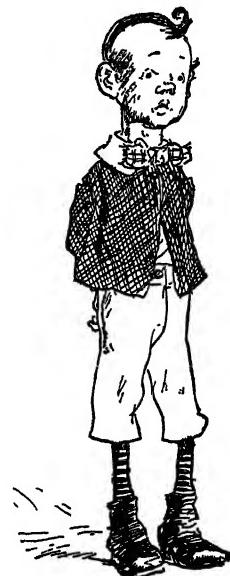
There had been more talk of her in August, 1879, when she had opened a church in Lynn, The Church of Christ Scientist, but it had been broken up in October, 1881, when eight of her chief followers had deserted, and now Lynn had grown so cold to her, that she, with her husband—her third, by the way—had made up their minds to move into Boston. Rumor had it that she was looking at the house at 569 Columbus Avenue as a place for her Metaphysical College.

The general impression among those who had heard of her was that it was the beginning of the end for her attempts to found a new faith. Also she was too old to get anywhere now. Sixty-one she was.

Much more promising, although not expected to originate any new religion, were Edward Everett Hale's "Lend-a-Hand Clubs" which had started in 1870 when from his Boston vestry he had circulated a pamphlet called *Ten Times One Is Ten* and urged everybody in general and youth in particular to lend a hand to others. "Ten Times One" clubs of young people had flanked the "Lend-a-Hand" organizations, all fighting sin and fostering good works under Hale's motto:

Look up and not down (Faith),  
Look forward and not back (Hope),  
Look out and not in,  
And Lend a hand (Love).

As the train rolled Wilde into Boston he could see that the city was aged, serene, beautiful, still outwardly the Boston of tradition, for it had not grown with the rapidity of Western cities, having, indeed, still less than 400,000 even after annexing suburban towns like Charlestown and Dorchester.



LITTLE  
ROBERT REED

*Verses destined to be widely read and memorized accompanied this picture which appeared in "Harper's New Monthly Magazine," July, 1880:*

"I'll never use tobacco, no;  
It is a filthy weed:  
I'll never put it in my mouth,"  
Said little Robert Reed.

"It hurts the health;  
It makes bad breath;  
'Tis very bad indeed.  
I'll never, never use it, no!"  
Said little Robert Reed.

A visitor from England must see many historic landmarks of the Revolution which so many English and Irish in the mother country had openly or covertly admired—Faneuil Hall, Boston Common, Old South Church, Christ Church—those buildings in which rebellious oratory or lanterns had shone.

Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Charles Street, Bunker Hill, Commonwealth Avenue—Wilde must see them all, must be taken within austere doorways whose latchstrings were none too loosely displayed, shown drawing-rooms on the second floor—must adjust himself to dinner at two and tea at night—must listen to heated arguments as to the likelihood or propriety of electric street lamps displacing gas.

Back in New York certain people were watching and waiting to see how Wilde would fare in this most difficult of American cities. Some people said they knew his attitude. One was a lady, herself from Boston, who had gone cooing up to him at a Gotham reception and had said, "Oh, Mr. Wilde, you have been adored in New York; in Boston you'll be worshiped."

"But I do not wish to be worshiped," Wilde had replied.

Modesty! That was his cue for Athens.

## 7

### LADY OF "THE BATTLE-HYMN"

WILDE reached "The Hub" on Saturday to find the streets piled thick with snow. People were telling each other that the coasting on the Common and the sleighing on the Medford road were elegant.

With difficulty the lecturer's carriage made its way toward the Vendome Hotel. In a Tremont Street saloon window a poster, heavily sunflowered, advertised a mixed drink as an "aesthetic" one.

The *Boston Transcript*, that organ of literary Puritanism, had heard that Wilde was telling Americans that there was no such thing as a moral or an immoral poem, and its editor, a friend of that Stedman who, in New York, had kept himself undefiled by contact with the Aesthete, was spreading a tale of outrage, declaring Wilde's doctrine to have "immoral features which will be condemned by most people of uninitiated intelligence. Taking these out, little is left save Wilde's





#### THE WHITE HOUSE CHINA

*"Soup, Fish, Fruit, Coffee, and Tea Dishes, for the New White House Set."*  
*"Harper's New Monthly Magazine," February, 1881, illustrates the kind of*  
*china painting to which Wilde, during his American tour, took such caustic*  
*exception.*

wardrobe, like the gilt and tinsel of the property man of the theater, to attract and amuse the public."

Physically Boston was, to a visiting lecturer, much like New York, Philadelphia, Washington, in the comforts of its hotel suite, the streams of callers and invitations. Soon after Wilde's arrival there came to his door an old friend of his family, Dion Boucicault, who, at the Museum, was playing a repertory of his own dramas, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, *Suil-a-mor* and *The Shamraun*.

Wilde breakfasted late with this fellow Irishman, who was fatherly and kind but who could do nothing about *Vera*, which was burning in the younger man's pocket. They would meet again, when they could talk without so many bellboys delivering invitations.

Among these was one that meant much—one from Oliver Wendell Holmes, who, it was rumored, had received one of the letters of introduction which the good-natured Ambassador Lowell had given Oscar as he sailed. Dr. Holmes, a widower, past seventy, the most quoted man in the East, asked Oscar to a dinner that was the specialty of the man famous as "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table." It was a simple feast, not large enough to impede the wit of a small group of guests. Holmes was too broad of mind to share the disdain with which that younger pundit of literature, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, was viewing Oscar Wilde. When Stedman had scorned Oscar in New York, Aldrich had approved, and had gone so far as to eliminate Wilde's name from the columns of his magazine, and to write Stedman "nothing cuts a showman or a literary clown like no notice at all." And Mrs. Aldrich had reason to know that, "During the stay of Mr. Wilde in Boston, Mr. Aldrich lived in strict seclusion. No invitations to dinners, receptions or lunches were accepted, on the chance that this prodigious poseur might also be a guest."

Boston, learning of this, took added notice of a rumor that Bronson Alcott had invited to his home the Londoner whom his daughter had met in New York, and that when asked about the matter, Alcott had denied issuing any such invitation.

## 2

That Wilde called upon Longfellow was soon known all over town, but details, true or imaginary as they might be, did not become topics of talk until some weeks later when newspapers all over the country began printing versions which agreed on many items.

It was said that Wilde had gone "at his own invitation." He had first sent word that he would like to call, "to which the great poet

politely replied that serious impairment of health forced him to decline the honor. Notwithstanding this, next morning Mr. Wilde appeared at the old mansion with an assurance that would take no rebuff, and the kindly old man was forced to endure the infliction. Mr. Longfellow's daughters were so indignant at the intrusion that they would not enter the room until summoned by a pathetic message from their father that he was very tired and wanted them to relieve him of the burden of entertaining the guest. They were angrier than ever to find how Wilde was talking to the old man.

"How do you like Browning?" Wilde was asking.

"I like him well," replied Longfellow gravely, "what I can understand of him."

"Capital! Capital!" said the Aesthete with a smile of condescension, and loudly clapping his hands. "I must remember that to repeat."

Whatever Bostonians might guess as to the truth or malicious fiction in the story, it was certain Wilde was touched by the ancient poet's charm, for, weeks later, he told a Cincinnati reporter how he had gone "to see Longfellow in a snow-storm and had returned in a hurricane" and "when I remember Boston I think only of that lovely old man, who is himself a poem, and of the bright party I met at Dr. Holmes'."

### 3

Having done his best by Oscar, Dr. Holmes let John Boyle O'Reilly take him, a thing John Boyle O'Reilly liked to do. As "the most romantic figure in literary Boston," a wit, poet, editor, story-teller, O'Reilly was a host, indeed, to any newcomer, and especially to one from Ireland. For O'Reilly as a youth had sat in Dartmoor prison awaiting death for his part in the Fenian revolt, and only the voice of the Queen had got him off with deportation. He had escaped while en route to Australia, and had finally reached Boston in 1869. Now he was a favorite of the literary Brahmins, the liberals, almost everybody, the author of several volumes of verse, and part owner of the Catholic journal, *The Pilot*.

O'Reilly swept Oscar to the home of Dr. James Read Chadwick, medical professor at Harvard, lover of books, art, and reformers. Dr. Holmes had called him, fondly, "the all-subduing agitator."

To meet Wilde, Chadwick had gathered in various members of the Papyrus Club, which had grown from a mere dinner group to an organization of over one hundred artists and intellectuals. For an hour or so, Oscar was happy with the group, then O'Reilly whirled him to the Globe Theater to see *Oedipus Rex*, then to St. Botolph's Circle, an-

other group dedicated to the arts. It was very late on Saturday night when O'Reilly delivered Wilde at his hotel.

On Sunday there were more callers, a sleigh-ride in the suburbs, and another talk with Boucicault. As the actor left, a reporter stepped up to him, asking what he thought of Wilde.

"Have you met Mr. Wilde?" the angry Dion flashed at the reporter. "No? Then of course you know very little about what sort of man he is.



### A WILDE LECTURE

*Sentences from Wilde's "English Renaissance" lecture illustrated in the "Daily Graphic," New York, January 11, 1882.*

"The use to which those managing his American tour are putting him is simply disgraceful. He is a gentleman of refinement and a scholar. They are making him a show. He is too simple and gentle in his nature to realize or even perceive his position. These speculators parade him as a kind of literary Dundreary, endeavoring to persuade him that notoriety is reputation."

Still more hotly, Boucicault spoke:

"The press seems to lend itself to this heartless exhibition which may afford amusement to some, but will be fatal and ruinous to its object. I have every right to feel hurt and indignant at the treatment he has suffered. There is no guile in him. He is the easy victim of those who expose him to ridicule and to the censure of the thoughtful. Those who have known him as I have since he was a child at my knee know that beneath the fantastic envelope in which his managers are circulating him there is a noble, earnest, kind and lovable man."

Friendship was working for Oscar in still another quarter. Sam Ward's kin folk were rallying. Sam's nephew, Francis Marion Crawford, a cosmopolitan youngster who had amazed Harvard with his dog-cart and his French clock worn as a watch, was home now in Boston, living with his aunt, Julia Ward Howe, after an adventure editing a newspaper in Allahabad, India.

He had met Uncle Sam's friend at Doctor Chadwick's Papyrus Club party. He had liked Oscar, and when the poet had said he wished to meet Mrs. Howe, young Crawford had said he would speak to her next morning.

And so he did.

Mrs. Howe was getting ready for church, but she dashed off a note inviting Wilde to lunch, and set her daughters and young Crawford to summoning "friends and viands."

Then she set off to the Church of the Disciples to hear James Freeman Clarke preach a "lofty and delightful sermon," after which she hurried home to be met at the door by her daughter Maud crying:

"Oscar is coming!"

And, as the spirited lady wrote in her diary, "we had what I might call a 'lovely toss-up,' i.e., a social dish quickly compounded and tossed up like an omelet." To her family she added, at the table, Oscar, Madame Braggiotti, another of her daughters, Julia, and Mrs. Jack Gardner, the art collector.

When he heard of this "lovely toss-up," Colonel Higginson boiled with Puritanic wrath, and although Mrs. Howe was one of his friends and fellow-contributor to *The Woman's Journal*, the Colonel made up his mind to straighten out some matters in her mind.

He sat down and wrote for the next issue of the magazine—it appeared February 4th—an article which he considered to be timely in its wholesomeness.

His pen denounced Wilde's poems as "immoral"; they should not be read; their "nudities do not suggest the sacred whiteness of an antique statue, but rather the forcible unveiling of some insulted innocence." Wilde was as guilty as Whitman, although "Whitman's offenses rest on a somewhat different ground"; Walt's poem "Drum Taps," describing Civil War moods, "always sounded hollow" since Whitman "never personally followed the drum, but only heard it from the comparatively remote distance of the hospital." In his Puritanic righteousness, the Colonel was ignoring the fact that Whitman had shattered his health

nursing wounded soldiers. The Colonel, having led Negro troops in the conflict, felt himself to have been especially noble.

And, in his martial fury, Higginson went on to ask what kind of Irish patriot was Wilde, for that matter? His mother's fervor for freedom was strong enough to inspire the enlistment of an army; but "is it manhood for her [Ireland's] gifted sons to stay at home and help work out the problem, or to cross the Atlantic and pose in ladies'



Daily Cod (aside): "Have 'Patience' with Oscar and I'll Manage the rest."

Mr. Wilde opened his discourse by stating that he did not intend to try to give any abstract definition of beauty. N. Y. Herald

### CARICATURES

*Caricatures of Wilde, D'Oyly Carte, and Bunthorne in the "Daily Graphic," New York, January 11, 1882.*

boudoirs or write prurient poems which their hostesses must discreetly ignore?" The Colonel pointed out that, "In the vicious period of the English Georges, Byron was banished from society, Moore was obliged to purify his poems, for less offenses against common decency than have been committed by Oscar Wilde."

But it was really the beginning of the article that caused a flurry among the cultured neighbors on Beacon Street. The Colonel had said:

"Women are as distinctively recognized as the guardians of the public purity as are the clergy of the public morals. Yet when a young man comes among us whose only distinction is that he has written a thin volume of very mediocre verse and that he makes himself something very like a buffoon for notoriety and money, women of high social position receive him at their homes and invite guests to meet him, in spite of the fact that if they were to read aloud to the company his poem of 'Charmides' not a woman would remain in the room until the end."

It was "Charmides" which most roused, at various times during Wilde's tour, defenders of the "pure" in literature. That symbolic poem, telling of a lad who made love to the statue of Athena and was hurled to death for the profanation, was taken in a very literal way by many a critic who saw it as merely "fleshy."



*Mrs. Ward Howe.*

JULIA WARD  
HOWE

From "Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography."

whose staff she and Higginson were associates, but in the *Transcript* of February 16th:

"As Colonel Higginson in *The Woman's Journal* takes exception to the entertainment of Mr. Oscar Wilde in private houses, I as one of the entertainers alluded to, desire to say that I am very glad to have had the opportunity of receiving Mr. Wilde at my house. I also take exception to the right which Colonel Higginson arrogates to himself of saying in a public way who should and who should not be received in private houses.

"Mr. Wilde's published poems are before the world and those who read them have the public right to express their opinions concerning them. It is one thing to do this with regard to the poems and another to proscribe him who wrote them.

"Colonel Higginson refers back to the social ostracism suffered by Lord Byron in his own country. . . . Colonel Higginson seems to forget that a tissue of personal scandals had much to do with Lord Byron's disgrace and also that the democratic spirit of his poetry gave great offense to the conservatism which was then absolute in England. Lord Byron's most objectionable poems were written at the close, not at the beginning, of his literary career. I for one have always thought with

Another stern sentence by Colonel Higginson completed his attack:

"We have perhaps rashly claimed that the influence of women has purified English literature. When the poems of Wilde and Whitman lie in ladies' boudoirs, I see no evidence of the improvement."

There were faint gasps along Beacon Street. Could it be that Colonel Higginson was referring to Mrs. Howe's little Sunday party?

It looked like it, since the article had come immediately after the luncheon. Mrs. Howe thought so, seized a pen and replied vigorously, not in the columns of the journal on

regret of the treatment endured by Lord Byron and, unless I am much mistaken, it has been regretted by many in England. To cut off even an offensive member of society from its best influences and most humanizing resources is scarcely Christian in any sense. The England of that day did not treat its brilliant reckless son as a mother should. For it must be remembered that if women are rightly 'the guardians of the public purity,' they are also the proper representatives of tender hope and divine compassion.

"Mr. Wilde is a young man in whom many excellent people have found much to like. Among his poems are some which judges as competent as Colonel Higginson consider to have much merit. He has come to our country thinking no doubt that he has something to teach us, but also, as I gather, quite willing to believe that he may learn something from his brief sojourn among us. I, for one, desire that the best homes may be open to him and that he may have the opportunity of seeing and conversing with our best people.

"If, as alleged, the poison found in the ancient classics is seen to linger too deeply in his veins, I should not prescribe for his case the coarse, jeering and intemperate scolding so easily administered through the public prints, but a cordial and kindly intercourse with that which is soundest, sweetest and purest in our own society. When he shall leave our shores I shall be glad to have him carry with him the remembrances of a fair hearing and of generous interest in which the shortcomings of his youth shall have been temporarily set out of sight and the best promise and possibility of his manhood cherished and promoted.

"JULIA WARD HOWE."

The Colonel's guns were spiked. He made no reply in *The Woman's Journal* nor elsewhere and his long-time friendship continued as though nothing had happened. At the height of the amiable polemics which had given a "woman's rights" leader an opportunity to speak, Mrs. Howe was at the home of Colonel Higginson reading to an eager audience her diary of travel in Greece. Nor did the Colonel's criticism hinder the sale of Oscar's poems.

But the incident, coming on top of all that he had seen of Boston,



*T. W. Higginson*

COLONEL  
THOMAS WENT-  
WORTH HIGGIN-  
SON

*From "Appleton's  
Cyclopedia of Amer-  
ican Biography."*

made its mark in Oscar Wilde's mind. Soon he would be telling some Britishers, "If one wants to realize what English Puritanism is—not at its worst, when it is very bad—but at its best, and then it is not very good—I do not think one can find much of it in England, but much can be found about Boston and Massachusetts. We have got rid of it. America still preserves it, to be, I hope, a short-lived curiosity."

## 8

## “GENTLE, SWEET, AND CRUSHING”

EVER since Colonel Morse, during the third week in January, had announced Wilde's engagement for the Boston Music Hall on January 31st—general admission fifty cents, reserved seats twenty-five and fifty cents extra—prospects for large attendance had been good.

And on Saturday the 28th, three days before the night of the lecture, an exciting rumor began to whet the appetites of many Bostonians who had had no desire to listen to anybody lecture about "The English Renaissance." On that Saturday the newspapers began discussing the report that "the sixty seats purchased by a Cambridge student would be occupied by Harvard students in dress coats, knee breeches and silk stockings, with lilies in their buttonholes."

The grave *Boston Transcript* had grown serious about the matter on Monday, for the college boys had capered and rioted often in Boston theaters, and had been for years accused of excessive animal spirits:

"Harvard students will not, we trust, undertake to treat a Music Hall audience with any less respect than one in the Sanders Theater. If they do, we hope they will be taught that police arrangements are at least as efficient in Boston as in Cambridge. Artemus Ward's saying that Harvard College was situated in the barroom of a certain popular hotel has been supplemented by the observation that the graduation exercises were held in the front benches of the theater on the nights when the dramas of the severely classic school (e.g., *The Black Crook*) are set forth. Here, by their elegant deportment, rows of collegians show the town how thoroughly they cultivate the amenities as well as the severities of life. What examples of polished manners and fine discourse do they not set to the admiring spectators!"

"The latest announcement from the seat of learning is that some

threescore youths will congregate at a lecture in Boston tomorrow night, and being there in a mass will display to a cultivated audience just exactly how scholarly gentlemen should carry themselves. At least that is what they will do if they are wise, since it cannot be believed that, with the consent of the police or the owners of the establishment, the Music Hall will be turned into a bear-garden, no matter what manner of man may be on the stage.”

And next day the *Transcript* kept up its warnings:

“We are assured that the Harvard demonstration at Music Hall this evening is intended not at all in derision of the lecturer, but rather in support of him, and that the costume to be worn by the students will evince their sympathy with his innovations in dress.

“Dress is a subject which the Harvard undergraduate has ever regarded with profound interest and some devoted attempts have been made at Cambridge scarcely less heroic than those of Oscar Wilde himself. But aside from his great public services in this direction, Mr. Wilde’s claims as a prize-man of Oxford and a particularly successful one too, he having won the first distinction in mathematics as well as in the classics, and the prize for English versification that Tennyson won, should insure him the respect at least of college boys whose distinction thus far has been wholly within the domain of dress alone.”

Another rumor had it that the Harvard authorities had given the boys permission to attend only after they had promised to behave. Warned, then, days in advance, that he would have to face concerted ridicule of some kind, Wilde came on Tuesday evening, January 31st, to a Music Hall with every seat “and every standing-space from floor to upper gallery filled.”

## 2

There is a flutter of real excitement; people mill about, in aisles and lobbies; police have to be enlisted to insure orderly seating. Not even the heavy snow, which has partly suspended horse-car travel, has kept away the audience—“fairly representative, including all social grades from highest to lowest.” The house is full of women, many of them “slaves of the queen of fashion”; there are others soberly dressed and serious of face. Everyone looks to see who else has “dared” to come. There is banter among intellectuals over the frivolity of coming to hear Oscar. Over gallery rails hang sealskin and ermine coats. Here and there are worn sunflower rosettes and fans.

Rows of empty chairs up in front; sixty vacant seats. Everybody knows who will fill them—those reckless Harvard boys!



### HARVARD AND DR. WALKER

Harvard students bombarding Dr. Mary Walker, the American dress reformer. The "Daily Graphic," New York, June 1, 1877.

Eight-fifteen. . . . The tread of the marching students is heard in the lobby. Every head is turned to see the spectacle. Opera-glasses are leveled. Here they come, marching down the center aisle in pairs. The newspaper reporters stand up to catch a good view, then sit down and scribble madly. The *Journal* man writes:

“Arrayed in all the ‘aesthetics’ that ingenuity could devise, they presented a most comical picture. There were blond wigs and black wigs, wide-floating neckties of every hue and fashion, vesture of susceptible youths and of strong-minded females, knee breeches and black stockings of ‘ye olden time,’ and in every hand the ‘precious loveliness’ of the lily or the ‘gaudy leonine’ glare of the sunflower. As the gracious youths entered they assumed all sorts of poses, and held aloft or looked languishingly down on the circling yellow petals of the flower that ‘turns on her god when she sets.’”

The hall shakes with hand-clapping and spectators stand, some on chairs. The boys are identified, with many a cry, “There’s Alfred; there’s John.” And in a certain row Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, a conspicuous patron, is electrified to see near the head of the procession her favorite grand-nephew, Winthrop Chanler.

The collegians at length take their seats, and there is a hush as the hour strikes for Oscar’s appearance.

“Then,” the *Journal* man writes, “a great bushy head was seen to rise above the steps leading from the anteroom, and a round of laughter and applause greeted the figure that emerged from behind the arras. With his body somewhat complacently inclined, Oscar Wilde glided to the lecture stand and opened a nondescript volume of manuscript in a roan covering.”

Wilde glances at the Harvard boys, surveys them coolly, then smiles easily, generously. This, notes the *Transcript* reporter, “instantly put the house on good terms with himself, as was testified by a fresh round of applause.” The *Journal* writer jots down how graciously Oscar smiles, how the audience smiles back—“A smile by three thousand persons simultaneously becomes audible, and so it gradually broadens into laughter.” The *Herald* representative sees Oscar glance down at the rows of fantastic masqueraders and smile, and hears him say, “I see about me the signs of an aesthetic movement. I see young men who are no doubt sincere, but I can assure them they are no more than caricatures.”

Up from the adult audience come some cries, “Good enough!” while a few horse laughs rise from corners of the hall.

“As I look about me,” Oscar continues, “I am impelled for the first time to breathe a fervent prayer, ‘Save me from my disciples.’ But

rather let me, as Wordsworth says, 'Turn from these bold, bad men.' "

There is another ripple of laughter, and then, the audience has time to realize a surprising thing—Oscar is *not* wearing knee breeches. They are, instead, "black cylindrical ones." He has on a dress coat, a white corded vest cut low, a wide low collar and a loose, drooping tie—more like an ordinary lecturer than like the Oscar of the cartoons. He is almost conventional.

"His own discarding of knee breeches," writes the *Transcript* reporter, "was considered by many to have given him the advantage over the students; and his quiet and gentle but telling hits at them evoked a ready recognition heightening that advantage and apparently leaving the audience in complete sympathy with himself. Several attempts at ironically protracted applause were hissed down with much unanimity."

Dashed, outwitted, and feeling somewhat foolish in their costumes, the Harvard boys quickly subside, disarmed by an "Oxford, '78" man.

"Easy and entirely self-possessed," as an observer writes, "Wilde began to read his lecture in soft and flowing tones."

Into his lecture, which was, in the main, that given in New York and elsewhere, Wilde wove a collegiate reference—a description of the Oxford students' work on a road as the result of Ruskin's social teachings. He himself had so worked, he said.

"Our enemies and our friends," continued he, "came out and mocked us at our work, but we didn't care much then, and we don't care at all now! These charming young men [indicating the students before him] might be inclined to follow our example; the work would be good for them, though I do not believe they could build so good a road."

There was laughter.

In Boston, Oscar said, he found one of the elements of a great civilized city—a permanent intellectual tradition. It had influenced thought in Europe, and it would continue to influence thought in America. He had visited Harvard that day, and he begged to assure the students before him that there was more to the movement of aestheticism than knee breeches and sunflowers!

He had been impressed at Harvard by things which promised well for the cause of art. He was charmed with the gymnasium. There was no antagonism between athletics and art. After mentioning the example of the Greeks, he suggested how finely the statue of a Greek athlete would look standing in the gymnasium, and what an ennobling influence it would have there.

"I should like to present the students with such a statue myself if they would accept it," he said, and there was applause.

As for the work of the students, he thought art should play a great part in it, and he did not see why an undergraduate should not receive a diploma for painting a beautiful picture or modeling a fine piece of



#### COLLEGE LIFE

*The Harvard student in revels with burlesque beauties and champagne.*  
*The “Daily Graphic,” New York, June 1, 1877.*

sculpture as well as for gaining a knowledge of “that dreadful record of crime known as history.”

As he spoke, launching into his main argument for the “movement,” he stood in his favorite gesture, left hand on hip, or feeling the small of his back, his finger tips tapping his manuscript. At the end he left the stage with his swaying walk, followed by the friendly noises betokening a victory.

A victory it had been, and not over the students alone.

A fortnight earlier, editors had written mostly about Wilde’s doctrine of art as having immoral features. They had said he was “in it

only for the money," had called him "the \$-sthete," had said if beautiful surroundings lent a sense of beauty, he should absent himself, with his knee breeches, from the gaze of his disciples. "Six feet three and round-shouldered in that dress!"

Now, the *Transcript* was confessing, "Mr. Wilde achieved a real triumph, and it was by right of conquest, by force of being a gentleman, in the truest sense of the word." There had been a "thorough-going chastening of the super-abounding spirits of the Harvard freshmen. Nothing could have been more gracious, more gentle and sweet, and yet more crushing, than the lecturer's whole demeanor to them." He had so won them that they themselves had been the ones to hiss down a "rougher element" which tried to disturb him by exaggerated applause.

The *Transcript* was itself frank and full in its own change of front. On the day of the lecture, it had declared that "this young worshiper of the beautiful" was subordinating content to form, "making the wine-glass more important than the wine," and it had patronized him loftily. Now, the day after the lecture, it conceded that while his applause had been overdone, "England and Ireland together have produced the heroes of Waterloo and Trafalgar and a breed of men who have dominated almost the world. Mr. Wilde is of the same stock, and born of such a strain. His general make-up is, if not a mystery, a wonder. Boston first and last has listened to orators. Mr. Wilde, now and for a generation to come, has made his own place among them, and will remain in memory."

Although the *Detroit Saturday Night* exposed Morse for having "cunningly put them [the college boys] up to the trick without their knowing that he was at the bottom of it" and then "informing the newspapers beforehand," Morse, with Barnumesque genius, spread the fiction that Wilde had first learned of the visitation "just an hour before the lecture"—a fiction which advertised Wilde's cleverness, and deluded his British friend Sherard into hailing the incident as proof of how "an English gentleman will always triumph in a contest with boors."

Reports of the episode, comic, factual, serious, ran quickly across the newspaper pages of the nation, and magazines appeared with it in various forms later that spring, when with the first flush of daily publicity past and gone, Oscar needed advertising. "Aunt Ruth" (Kate Crombie) did Oscar no harm when in the April issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, she published a long, kindly account of the affair, describing it in homely dialect and deciding "Oscar appears encommon patient and good-natered."

The incident was also helpful in that it set citizens in all towns,

where Wilde was scheduled to speak, wondering if local college or high-school boys would imitate the Harvard buffoons. Wilde's lecture was becoming something more than an exhibition of novel ideas and knee breeches; it was becoming a thing of public sport and suspense.

## 3

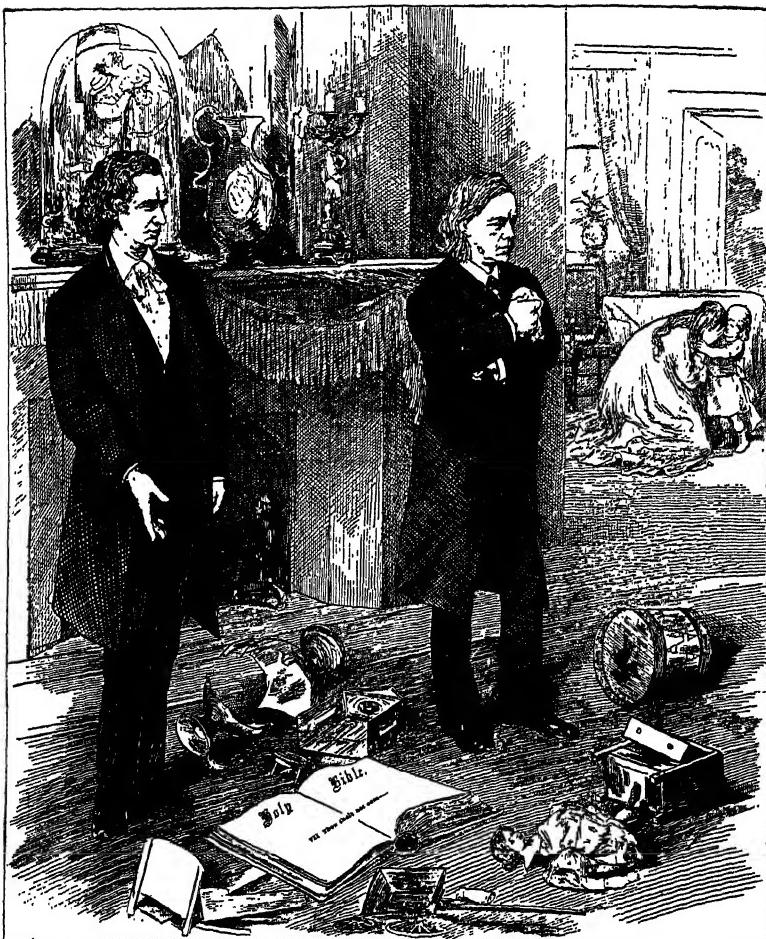
The rumor was that the Yale boys would outdo their Harvard rivals when Oscar lectured in New Haven on February 1st; and appear they did, two hundred of them wearing red neckties and yellow sunflowers in buttonholes, and marching behind a very tall Negro, the servant of the Trowbridge family, similarly bedecked. But the prank was too much an imitation of the Harvard demonstration to attract newspaper notice, and Wilde himself paid Yale no heed. As if in dismay at the sudden fizzling of the jest, the boys of Temple College abandoned their lampoon plans when Oscar appeared February 2nd in Hartford's opera house.

Two nights later, in Brooklyn, Oscar was philosophical about the Harvard boys. To a *New York Sun* reporter who had come across to the Brooklyn Academy to interview the Aesthete after his lecture, Oscar said, “Oh, I could sympathize with them, because I thought to myself that when I was in my first year at Oxford I would have been apt to do the same; but as they put their head in the lion's mouth, I thought they deserved a little bite.”

D'Oyly Carte's office had found the interest in him so great that a Western tour, reaching as far west as St. Louis, had been arranged, and Oscar verified this to the reporter: “I suppose I shall lecture in the West, if there is anything left of me. I like the excitement of lecturing, and when one gets an interested audience, it is a pleasure; but I hate traveling. I hate punctuality, and I hate time-tables. The railroads are all alike to me. One is simply intolerable; another is simply unbearable.”

Oscar had just come from the stage where he had told two thousand Brooklyn patrons that criticisms of him “were as ignorant as they are insolent.” The audience that night had been stony except when it hissed down youths who, from standing room around the doors had kept calling, “'Urry hup, Hoscar!” before the lecturer entered, and who had prolonged, satirically, the two or three ripples of applause which more serious listeners had given Oscar's points on art—notably, “Art can have only one object, its own perfection.”

Into the Academy, during Wilde's speech, had come a stocky, red-faced man to look sharply at the speaker for a few minutes, then to go



### "THE PITY OF IT"

The "Daily Graphic," New York, July 29, 1874, pictures the ruin of the Tilton household as caused by the great scandal. Theodore Tilton is at the left, the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher in the center, while Mrs. Tilton weeps upon the breast of her infant child for shame at being accused of adultery with her beloved pastor.

out. He was Nat Goodwin, who had come over between acts of his play *Hobbies* at a near-by theater, and who had hurried back to interject a comic impersonation of the Aesthete into the next act.

## 4

Brooklyn, at the time of Wilde's visit, was, in its way, the Holy City of that new kind of preaching that had arisen in America since the war. Like so many of the phenomena which Wilde was beholding, this had been born of the struggle against slavery.

While the pre-war churches had remained silent on Abolition, fire-brand clergymen here and there in Massachusetts had first broken over the traces. Theodore Parker, Channing, and many younger men influenced by them, either set up independent pulpits or kept within organization bounds that were loosed, in the opinion of orthodox minds, to the point of heresy.

From discussing the moral issue of slavery, these evangelists had passed to so many controversial social subjects that there had gradually been evolved what people called “Ethical Churches,” where Jehovah and hell-fire sunk further and further from view, and where the holy rostrum became a platform, the church a forum, and the pulpit something resembling that American political institution, the stump. The great Brooklyn exponent of the new preaching, Henry Ward Beecher, had even gone so far as recently to invite that infidel, Robert G. Ingersoll, to address the congregation.

The force of the Calvin grip upon American religion had been badly shaken by agnosticism and deism—which so many of the abolitionists, as liberals, had approached—and by the quick spread of Darwinism. Furthermore the orgy of political corruption and industrial freebooting that had come since the war had prepared masses of churchgoers to shift their allegiance from the conventional preachers of Biblical texts to the reformers who discussed problems of the day, not of the hereafter. Everywhere there was talk of money, of opportunity, of fortunes to be made in railroads, mines, factories, stock gambles, salesmanship. More people each year lost interest in the peril of hell-fire. Materialism was in the air and the new ethical preachers, even if they denounced it, spent their energy upon it rather than upon the doctrine of original sin.

For a generation prior to Wilde's arrival English visitors had been more curious to see that Pope of the new independent churches, Henry Ward Beecher, than any other preacher or orator. But in 1882 Beecher's sun was going down; not only that, it had a slowly fading cloud across

its face. His moral reputation was not what it had been, and also, at sixty-nine, he was giving ground to a fifty-year-old rival, Thomas De Witt Talmage.

For thirty-five years Beecher had reigned in Brooklyn as America's leading preacher, but Talmage, since coming to the city twenty-two

years later, had excelled him as a magnet for crowds. Wilde, when he had had time to study the two rivals, would put it well when he would say, "It is monstrous to compare Dr. Talmage to the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher; it is like comparing Clown to Pantaloons."

By outdoing Beecher in public antics, more frenzied denunciations of public evils and indulgencies, and by more sensational topics, Talmage had made it possible for his Presbyterian church to erect a tabernacle to seat five thousand, against Beecher's Plymouth church capacity of three thousand. Talmage had also outdone the older man in the syndication of sermons to newspapers and magazines. Beecher had been the first to sell his printed sermons for simultaneous publication on a national scale, and Talmage, copying the idea, had carried it to new limits, having now, in 1882, more than six hun-

### MISS SUSAN B. ANTHONY

*The famous reformer who was credited with having let out the secret of the Beecher-Tilton scandal. "Daily Graphic," New York, September 1, 1874.*

dred daily and weekly journals in America, England, Scotland, Canada, and Australia reproducing his regular Sunday tirade.

For all that he pretended to be an evangelist of the old orthodox persuasion and railed against Ingersoll as "the champion blasphemer of America," Talmage lavished his time and oratory upon vague exposés of gambling, prostitution, horse-racing, political bribery, stock-market gambling and other topical horrors. He preferred such popular hubbubs to the old-time religious subjects, and only harped upon the latter when such things as Beecher's apostasy in the direction of Darwinism made ancient dogmas things of news value. Beecher, himself, was preparing, now, to compromise with the theory of evolution and within a few months would declare "Paul was a Darwinian. Paul taught



that man was an animal with a spiritual man superimposed upon him.”

The carriage which showed a distinguished visitor around Brooklyn would roll, first of all, to Plymouth Church, where for so long the seats, gallery on gallery climbing to the roof, had been packed.

Yes, this was the place where Beecher had sold the slave woman at auction before the war, a piece of propaganda which had been second only to that book of his sister's, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Here he had raised money for Sharp's rifles to be sent to Free-Soil settlers in “Bleeding Kansas”—had sent them disguised as books. Everyone in England had known about these “Beecher's Bibles.”

It was as good as a play to see Beecher walk into that church, take off his overcoat, sit down and strip off his rubbers, grinning meanwhile at the singing congregation, then stride up and down the wide platform speaking on whatever would fit that superb instrument, his voice, “the bell of the soul.” Beecher had never cared for rules. He had seceded from the Congregationalists; had seceded from a clergyman's association; had forsaken hell-fire.

Influence? Why, he had changed the whole course of Americans' sermons, Brooklyn believed. He'd brought laughter into church; told jokes to make congregations laugh; laughed himself; made church-going happy. He said to dour and protesting clergymen that if the Lord had given him humor, the Lord surely meant him to use it. He had changed the form of the American pulpit too; had said he wouldn't go on preaching from a high box plastered up against the wall as though he was a barn swallow in a nest. He had introduced the big, wide platform where he could roam up and down, gesticulating, close to the people.

#### The Scandal?

Of course it had hurt him some, but then his congregation had stood by him, and had staged a great weeping welcome home when the six months' trial had ended. That had been only some seven years ago; biggest sensation the American newspapers had had since Lee surrendered at Appomattox. Tremendous! Page after page of testimony, discussion, interviews, page after page, month after month.

What had happened was this: Beecher, before the war, had made a sort of protégé of a brilliant New York newspaperman, Theodore Tilton. Beecher and Beecher's friends had given him some help in securing the editorship of *The Independent*, a semi-religious weekly, and Tilton had proved to be a great editor, a fascinating fellow, handsome as Apollo. Fifteen years ago women had been known to say he looked like Jesus, but they didn't say that any more now.

He had worshiped Beecher. Together they had worked for temper-

ance, abolition, honesty in politics. The younger man had followed Beecher onto the lecture platform.

By the way, Mr. Wilde might meet Tilton on the lecture platform. Tilton was probably still in the West, though it was being said that he intended to quit and go to Paris to live. Too many people believed he had slandered Beecher in the trial.

Yes, the trial had been caused by Tilton.

All through the early 1870's there had been a lot of whispering about Beecher and Tilton's wife, Lib, a pretty, gushing, tender creature, who had shared her husband's adoration for the great orator. Charges against the pair had been first printed by a woman reformer, Victoria Woodhull, in her free-love journal, *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, and everybody thought she had got the facts from Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton or others of the woman's rights-temperance reform group which was so thick with the Beechers and the Tiltons.

Tilton had finally, on January 11, 1875, sued Beecher for alienation of his wife's affections, and had produced evidence that Lib had confessed that her eloquent pastor had convinced her he was not understood at home, and that such beautiful love as he and she had for each other was righteous and that, eventually, it was to be expressed in ways more adequate than by "the shake of the hand or the kiss of the lips."

In letters read at the trial had appeared sensational phrases to become bywords across the nation—"nest-hiding," "paroxysmal kisses," and "on the ragged edge."

Beecher had been so confident on the stand, so vaguely of the opinion that nothing like adultery had happened, that the jury had been puzzled. Nowhere did he make explicit denials of the acts as charged. Great pressure for his acquittal had been brought by the churches, and by important Republicans who were mindful of many campaign



MRS. ELIZABETH R. TILTON

*The women of America believed her guilty and Beecher innocent.*  
"Daily Graphic," New York, September 1, 1874.

speeches by the preacher. Prominent people had said the whole structure of American morals would topple if this revered pillar of virtue collapsed. So the jury had disagreed, while the *Argonaut* had aptly summarized the public's verdict as “the women believed Beecher innocent and Mrs. Tilton guilty.”

Many newspapers had denounced the verdict and the preacher, Henry Watterson's *Louisville Courier-Journal* calling Beecher “a dung-hill covered with flowers.” But now, in 1882, the scandal was pretty well blown over. Tilton had been more often berated than commended. He had gone on lecturing, but had parted from his wife.

It was too bad Mr. Wilde couldn't meet Beecher in Brooklyn, but the preacher was off lecturing somewhere. So many people said the two men looked alike, the same heavy eyelids, the same long hair. They would like each other, and, after all, Mr. Wilde mustn't forget that Brooklyn was still referred to as “Beechertown” in many newspapers —the only large city to be known by the name of a citizen.



## B O O K   T H R E E

### *MARCH ACROSS THE CONTINENT*

# I

#### **“AMERICA—THE PARADISE OF WOMEN”**

AS Oscar Wilde departed from the seaboard capitals of government, finance and society, the *Columbus Dispatch*, out in Ohio, received word from an Eastern correspondent that women outnumbered men seven to one in the Aesthete's audiences. And although there were other observers to think the disparity not so great, it was generally agreed that it was the women who went to see Wilde and the men who wrote about him.

Wilde, himself, had not been in America long enough to note at least three reasons for his popularity with women: the rise of the cities, the new excitement over etiquette and the current Anglomania.

For twenty odd years the crescendo of industry had been changing the existence of American women as well as men. Each year new flocks of housewives had moved with their husbands to the large cities, and had taken up a life of greater ease, either in hotels or in houses equipped with servants, than they had known in the country. With wealth pouring in from business or from sky-rocketing real estate, these women had found themselves with comparatively little to do. Change from the manifold activities of a farm establishment to the leisure of city life had given them a new outlook. Notions, fads, fashions, styles, came and went with a velocity unimagined in pre-war days.

To capture culture and social position quickly was the determination of throngs of American women who had been content with the old agrarian civilization which fostered spinning, quilting, weaving, carding, making soap, drying apples—all the innumerable duties of their farm-wife régime—duties which in many items approached the handicraft arts which Wilde was preaching.

At the top of the heap were the wives of those war-born millionaires who had begun to clamber, like Goths, over the walls of New York

society. "Shoddyites," the vested patricians called them, because so many of them had grown affluent selling adulterated woolen cloth, called "shoddy," for Federal uniforms during the Civil War.



#### AN EVENING DRESS

*"If a foolish girl by dint of squeezing secures the conventional wasp waist, she is tolerably certain to gain a red nose." The picture is of an evening dress of 1882. "Godey's Lady's Book," September, 1882.*

"Society" was no longer dominated, as it had been up to 1860, by the rich planters of the South. "The Civil War," said Archibald Forbes, "wiped out the Southern social element which was so bright, so sparkling, so refined, so overbearing." It was from fortunes laid, if not made, in contracting, manufacturing, and extracting commissions during the war that the new-rich of the great cities had obtained their tickets of admission to the world of fashion. Forbes had seen "society boom after Appomattox" and by 1880 settle to three centers, New York, Boston and Washington, in place of Charleston, Baltimore and Richmond. New York's world of fashion he considered to be the "largest, gayest, most lavish, piquant. Its dinner courses were tediously elaborate, its menus monuments of costliness."

He noted how "the serpent of extravagance lurks on the table, but its folds are hidden under blossoms and foliage . . . there is a winsome daintiness in every appointment that screens the coarse flash of the dollar. . . . Women dress and carry their dress as no other women out of Paris do. . . . It is 'the thing' with them to be gracious. . . . I regard the New York belle as the brightest talker in the world. . . . The New York season is a delirious whirl."

#### 2

With the industrial cities so gay, and wealth so glamorous, the repose of the rural civilization had been shaken. A new fear had developed on a wide scale, the fear of being considered "countrified."

"Thank gentlemen who give you their seats on omnibuses or cars. This is not countrified, it is lady-like."

Thousands of eyes had been reading this ever since it had first appeared in the early 1870's on a page of Florence Hartley's *Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness*. Miss Hartley, as one of the many authorities rising since the late 1860's to set country girls straight on manners in the big towns, had seen her book go through several editions, each suitably modernized. And like her sister-mentors on social matters, she was busy adjusting their sex to the new freedom of travel which had come in the last score of years. Not only had railroads increased prodigiously, as had horse-cars in cities, but the old-fashioned prejudices against women traveling were disappearing. Visits to cities were now magic adventures in the minds of rural girls.

Miss Hartley enjoined them to carry money in a strong pocket in the upper petticoat when journeying, and not to forget to take along, in a traveling satchel, "some crackers or sandwiches for luncheon"; also, "if you are to pass the night in the cars, carry a warm woolen or silken hood; no one can sleep comfortably in a bonnet." And, "in trains, do not continually pester either your companion or the conductor with questions such as, 'Where are we now?' or 'When shall be arrive?'"

"When you travel alone, choose, if possible, a seat next another lady or near an elderly gentleman."

Special etiquette was in force on steamboats, Miss Hartley advising, "Before you retire find out the position and number of the stateroom occupied by your escort, in case you will wish to find him during the night." Steamboats were known to blow up now and then and to get afire more often than that. In either event, the attentions of the escort "will be found invaluable."

Since the railroads had made the arrival of guests, from a distance, so much more common, codes were established for hostesses, particularly for farm women who could not be expected to know what their city relatives would expect. Miss Hartley felt that the right thing was for a hostess to provide her female guest with both a feather bed and a mattress "so that she may place whichever she prefers uppermost." And for the guest's bedroom, two chairs were obligatory, one to sit in, "and a low one to use while washing the feet."

The country girl who visited the city was coached not to "put bonbons and cakes in your pocket at supper," and "to carry in your pocket a small pincushion, and having unfolded your napkin, to pin it at the belt. You may do this quietly without its being perceived, and you will thus really save your dress."

"Gloves and mittens are no longer worn at table, even at the largest dinner-parties."

Mrs. H. O. Ward was instructing readers of *The Youth's Com-*

*panion* not to drink from saucers and "as soon as you are helped, begin to eat. The custom of waiting is obsolete."

Fashion arbiters were quarreling over the proper disposition of napkins by dinner guests; should they be folded neatly or abandoned in dishabille?

Out in Laramie, Wyoming, an editor who signed himself Bill Nye was, that spring of 1882, writing in his newspaper, *The Boomerang*:

"The law of the napkin is vaguely understood.

"It is poor taste to put it in your pocket and carry it away. The rule of etiquette is becoming more and more thoroughly established that napkins should be left at the house of the hostess. It should be left beside the plate where it may be easily found by the hostess and returned to the neighbor from whom she borrowed it for the occasion.

"If, however, the lady of the house is not doing her own work, the napkin may be carefully jammed into a globular wad, and fired under the table to convey the idea of pampered abandon."

How to behave at the piano had become a matter for the academicians. The organ, with its foot-pumps, was, in upper circles, as old-fashioned as the spinet. Since the arrival of riches in the cities, pianos had become the thing, and mahogany lumbermen, cabinet-makers, piano salesmen, piano tuners—a few blind ones were appearing in 1882—and piano teachers galore were prospering. The latter had, quite commonly, assumed the old American prerogative of calling themselves "Professor." British travelers for twenty years had been noting how, in America, barbers, corn-doctors, itinerant teachers of penmanship, had been encroaching upon the schoolmasters' right to that title.

"Girls are expected to play some instrument," announced Miss Hartley. "The piano is at the present day the most popular instrument in society. The harp has ceased to be fashionable." When visiting, a girl was expected to play, and when called upon should "choose a brilliant, showy piece, but let it be short. Avoid the loud, thumping style and also the over-solemn style. Avoid movement at the piano. Swinging the body to and fro, moving the head, rolling the eye, raising the hands too much, are all bad tricks. When you have finished your piece, rise instantly from the piano stool, as your hostess may wish to invite another guest to take the piano."

Country girls were warned that city hosts would be apt to propose a horseback ride. Mounting the steed with the muscular assistance of a gentleman would be a ticklish ordeal for a Puritanic maiden. Miss Hartley felt it indelicate to suggest in writing that the swain might, in this crisis, take a carnal peek or two while he gave the belle a leg up into the saddle, so she explained very nicely to her gentle readers that

"the gentleman should place himself firmly near, but not so near to you as to impede your rising, and with the same view must hold his head well back, as, should he lose his hat from a whisk of your habit, the effect produced is not good."

Other guides announced it the fashion for a man to walk up flights of stairs squarely beside a girl, not slightly behind her since, in the latter order of march, she might suspect him of taking a survey of her ankles. But Miss Hartley could only put it thus: "If you meet a gentleman at the foot of a flight of stairs, do not go up before him. Stop, bow and motion to him to precede you. He will return your bow and run up, leaving you to follow him."

All teachers of etiquette insisted that the new freedom for ladies did not include the showing of even a modicum of leg. Mrs. H. O. Ward was declaring in *The Youth's Companion*: "A lady who sits cross-legged, or sideways on a chair, who twirls her trinkets, and a man who bits his nails or nurses his leg, manifests an unmistakable want of good breeding." Mrs. Ward also insisted that, "American gentlemen do not smoke when driving or walking with ladies. . . . A gentleman does not offer both of his arms when walking with two ladies. . . . A gentleman does not permit a lady to sit with her back to the horses even though she be younger than himself."

Next to playing the piano to please her hostess, the country girl on a visit to the city must know that her most important duty would be to sew. Miss Hartley suggested, "a pretty compliment is for you to knit her a pair of ottomans whilst with her."

Farm mothers were quick to tell their daughters to work on fancy things, like doilies, during visits, and not to think of crocheting, as they did at home, skillet-holders, wristlets, tea cozies, nor, above all, pot-hushers.



CHILD'S DRESS

*Child's Dress (Crochet, Victorian stitch). "Godey's Lady's Book," December, 1882.*

an egg-warmer, a blanket-like affair with eight pockets in which boiled eggs could be kept in condition on the breakfast table. Pen wipers in the form of black cats with red silk tongues and shoe-button eyes were advised for young fingers. *Godey's Lady's Book* was, in the early months of 1882, verifying Miss Hartley's report that "the taste for fancy work increases daily . . . opera hoods, wool shawls, sleeves, Sontags, may be varied by embroidering smoking caps for gentlemen."

Braiding, embroidery, Berlin work, knitting, and crocheting were varied by a craze, rising in the early 1870's and continuing, for "La Frivolité," which, in its more rudimentary form, had been called "tatting." Knitted leggings were popular, the pattern-makers declared, saving the lives of ladies on cold drives to balls or evening parties.

Three pleasures of urban society, dancing, private theatricals, and games, were touchy subjects for the teachers of etiquette in 1882. The old proscriptions of the dominant Calvinistic régime had begun to wane, just as the grip of the orthodox churches was, itself, weakening all over the country. However, with the bans still observed in millions of homes, any lecturer or writer on manners had to treat them easily. Florence Hartley confined her "dance don'ts" to details of posture and scanty dressing: "In waltzing, stand a little to the right of your partner, so that in clasping your waist, he may draw you upon his arm to his shoulder, not his breast. The last position is awkward."

*Godey's Lady's Book*, by the spring of 1882, had recognized dancing sufficiently to counsel a girl never to let her partner assist in "holding up her dress when dancing." . . . "If a lady discovers that her partner is a good waltzer, a neat way of complimenting him would be to throw out the suggestion that he had probably been abroad."

Newspapers, here and there, directed girls never to cross the ballroom floor alone between dances. This would be misconstrued as a bid for notice. The *Boston Transcript* was reporting in 1882 that fashionable society was bestowing "the significant epithet 'chandeliering' on the practice of persons who make themselves the central ornaments of the ballroom by waltzing very slowly in the middle of the floor."

## 4

Rigorous corseting, which was more severe in 1882 than a decade before, presented a special danger to the eye of Miss Hartley:

"If a foolish girl, by dint of squeezing and bracing with busk and bone, secures the conventional wasp waist, she is tolerably certain to gain an addition she by no means bargained for, a red nose, which, in numberless instances, is produced by no other cause than the un-

natural girth, obstructing circulation and causing stagnation of the blood in that prominent and important feature."

*The Woman's Journal* was declaring that it was ridiculous that "women should subject themselves to a grotesque movement by the use of small and ill-shaped boots," and that they must be compressed "into the shape of insects by means of tight-laced corsets. Faintness, syncope and even death might result from excessive corseting; a woman's body had been dissected and her ribs found squeezing her liver."

Etiquette books which sought their circulation among the great bulk of church-going, rural housewives, books such as *The Bazar Book of Decorum*, which Harper's publishing house had been selling widely since 1877, sought to end the big city habit of piercing the ears for the display of earrings:

"Fashionable girls, before they reach ten years of age, are taken to some jeweler or surgeon to have their ears bored. The little ones seldom go unwillingly, so early are they disposed to offer themselves as sacrifices to that exacting deity, Fashion. The operator holds a cork firmly against one side of the lobe of the ear, while from the under side he transfixes it with a needle or an awl. Then a thread is pulled through and left to fester, so that the opening, once made, may not close again."

Private theatricals were mildly recommended by most etiquette authorities because "nobody but young men, certainly not our girls" would be thus drawn to the drama as a profession; "few women are ever known to go on the stage except from necessity."

*Godey's Lady's Book*, that household guide, was, in the spring of 1882, proposing parlor games other than charades, which diversion bordered too closely upon dramatics. Family parties, the editor admitted, were never very lively, and needed brightening up, but the way to do it was with games like "Fanning" where "one of the company commences by saying, 'My uncle has sent me a fan from China,' and each one in turn says that he has received a fan from some part of the world, and fans himself with his right hand. This is followed by the leader asserting that he has received another fan from another relative in some other part of the world, and commences fanning himself with both hands."

Thenceforth the arrival of fans was to be represented by nodding the head, waving the feet, shaking the shoulders until "the effect becomes most absurd and laughable. The fun consists in keeping up the fanning as long as possible."

While it was agreed that the new forwardness of women in many fields had not yet put them to imitating men in the use of slang, authorities were finding it necessary to enjoin wives not to refer to their husbands any more as "good man," or "lord," or plain "husband." Girls were not to use such phrases as "what-d'ye-call-it," "thingummy," or "what's-his-name."



#### WALKING DRESS FOR A CHILD

*Fashions for a  
girl of nine years.  
"Godey's Lady's  
Book," January,  
1882.*

January, 1882, sounded the prevailing note well when in her love story *Mock Jewels* she caused a horrible example, young Lawrence, by name, to stun his nice sister, Louisa, with—

"Pooh, sis!"

"Please, Lawrence, do not use such expressions," pleaded the sister. "What expressions?" asked Lawrence. "All the fellows talk so and very much more so, I can tell you!"

Fiction writers for *Godey's* took pains, also, to show what an error it was to marry for anything but the purest objectives. Clare Schwester

It was want of good breeding that made women persist in spotting conversation with "you know," "I'll tell you that," "you perceive," "you understand," "says he" or "says I." Miss Hartley permitted the use of "a few simple, earnest words like 'Good gracious!', 'Mercy!' or 'Dear me!'" But she was quick to warn, "Never point! It is excessively ill-bred," and "when walking on the street, never look back. Walk slowly, do not turn your head to the right or left." And when sitting down in elegant homes, "do not lean your head against the wall. You leave an indelible mark upon the paper, or, if the wall is whitewashed, you give your hair a dingy, dusty look by bringing it into contact with the lime."

The industry of purveying advice to the housewife and the country girl was not confined to authorities on decorum. Women writers of fiction, coming into their own in the past twenty years, found it profitable to tell wholesome stories in elegant language and to make their most sympathetic characters models of what was genteel and noble. Ino Churchill in *Godey's Lady's Book* for

was thus careful to have Ethel Abbott, the heroine of her story *Ethel's Choice*, in the March number, make a great mistake by refusing a poor young suitor and sending him away on an Arctic expedition. Gordon Bennett's polar ship had been crushed by northern ice in June, 1881, and the disaster had caused a wide sensation.

"What a charming picture of *dolce far niente* Ethel Abbott makes lying far back luxuriantly in a hammock," Miss Schwester wrote, "her beautiful head pillow'd on soft white arms, and her hair, of that rich shade of chestnut-brown and shining in the sunlight which slips in through the thick foliage of the arbor. . . .

"'Ethel!'

"Miss Abbott gives a little startled cry as the owner of the eyes—a tall, well-built fellow of twenty-four or five—comes quickly into the arbor.

"'Jack—how you frightened me!'"

Jack, it proved, was leaving on an Arctic expedition unless Ethel gave him her hand at once. But, "No, Jack, we are both too poor." She admitted she was "mercenary"; she wanted "diamonds and horses and Worth costumes." And so: "Heaven forgive you, Ethel."

6

In the craze of the big-town society women for new and newer fashion, many of the principles of the British aesthetic movement had been embraced, although often imperfectly translated. In the use of subdued color the adoption had been whole-hearted, and in many details of interior decoration, American authorities had, for several years, been reflecting the movement.

In architecture, however, America had set off on a course directly opposed by Oscar Wilde. The new-rich, and those who imitated the new-rich, had been feeling that houses should represent the fresh age of wealth, invention and industry. They had grown dissatisfied with and contemptuous of the colonial architecture which, up to the 1860's, had been the most admired of styles. To a country suddenly rich, it had seemed all at once too countrified for any further use, especially as architects, eager for their share of the lavish expenditures, told prospective customers that colonial architecture had never been anything anyway but an elaboration of the farmhouse, and was, at its best, much smaller than even a moderate manor house in England.

At first the freshly made millionaires, with machines so strong in their minds, had liked to have the scroll saw take its contortions without restraint in expensive woods, and to own a house in which crevices,

niches and recesses, inside and out, were as ready for a fleck of dust or a nesting bird as had ever been a Gothic cathedral.

Then, in the early 1870's, there had come across the Atlantic the writings and ideas of a Britisher, C. L. Eastlake, whose book *Hints on Household Taste* was having large effect in England. Eastlake was quarreling bitterly with the upholsterers who had, for years, been having their own way with customers:

"The tendency of the present age of upholstery," he had said, "is to run into curves—a vicious reminder of the old Louis Quatorze extravagance of contour. Chairs are invariably curved in such a manner as to insure the greatest amount of ugliness with the least possible comfort. The backs of sideboards are curved in the most senseless and extravagant manner, drawing-room tables are curved in every direction, and are therefore inconvenient and always rickety."

When the fabulous Centennial Exposition, celebrating the United States' first one hundred years, had been held in Philadelphia in 1876, the displays of furniture from abroad had swung fashion away from Eastlake to the old English style, the Queen Anne, and, by 1878, Harriet Prescott Spofford, in her much-followed book, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture*, had found Queen Anne "everywhere disputing with Eastlake chairs, ugly past belief, but invincibly strong, and Eastlake bedsteads, clean-shaped and charming."

With wealth so limitless, tastes so uncritical and so eager, American homes were filled with—and seemingly could not be too full of—endless varieties of period furniture—Gothic, Renaissance, Elizabethan, Jacobean, many Louis, Queen Anne and Empire.

Eastlake, whose creations had led the angry upholsterers to say that they "would as lief be shut up in a church as in a room with his furniture," was being defeated, on the American battleground, in most wealthy homes. There the rococo as a symbol of riches was too much to resist.

The orgies of the upholsterer had extended to plush puffs and fancy protuberances on everything down to waste-paper baskets and lamps. Chairs and sofas, so tufted and stuffed that no woodwork was visible, stood overawing the angular timbers of Eastlake.

Velvet curtains, bamboo easels for pictures, folding screens "of gilded glass, peacock plumes and odd-shaped panels of embroidered velvet" crowded drawing-rooms. Mrs. Spofford approved: "The davenport, the *étagère*, the corner shelves, all help to fill the drawing-room and give it the air of occupancy, and use, and agreeable life. Provided there is space to move about without knocking over the furniture, there is hardly likely to be too much in the room."



TABERNACLE FREE BATHS

*The Reverend Talmage's religious revivals ridiculed in "Puck," June 9, 1880.*



She disapproved of the upright piano as "requiring the singer, when playing the accompaniment, to face the wall in singing."

By 1879 the English aesthetic movement had made its mark in American homes—one reason why women had been so curious to see the best advertised of all the Aesthetes on his lecture tour.

Ella Rodman Church, prescribing on decorative interiors to readers of the September, 1879, issue of *The Art Journal*, had revealed the new fashions that were rising. The dining-room was where aestheticism was most needed:

"For some time past, until quite recently, the sideboard most affected was of veneering and varnish with glued-on ornaments of dead game and furnished with a marble slab for the convenient breakage of glass and china. Bent and curved into every form but that which would secure sound construction and harmonious lines, the modern sideboard is one of the most melancholy instances of wasted energy which the upholsterer's ingenuity can supply."

The right sideboard she felt to be that which was coming into vogue, a glueless "modified Eastlake" covered with Oriental stuff—"heavily fringed at each end" and with shelves "covered with crimson or maroon leather." To get one of these would be difficult for persons of limited means, but it might be managed by "instituting a savings fund, to save on concert tickets or needless desserts."

Mrs. Church was quarreling with the American faith that "the dining-room is the proper background for family portraits." Dead game and dead relatives were both out of place near food. "Let them be anywhere but in the dining-room or parlor. A judicious sprinkling of them in the library or hall is in better taste."

Where the aesthetic passion for color ought to be successful was, she thought, on the dining-room mantel—that institution without which "any room has not the dignity of a tent. The mantel is part of the



LADY'S WALKING DRESS

*Styles for summer.  
"Godey's Lady's Book," May, 1882.*

reverence due the chimney." Women were urged to remodel their mantels into "a two- or three-story arrangement of oak or walnut to hold bric-a-brac," and to awaken to the fact that "a legend across the front of the mantel in Old English lettering is very pretty . . . the letters in black and gold, or maroon and vermilion."

The dining-rooms of America's recent past had been cursed with too much sunlight, Mrs. Church decreed. "In a city locality," windows were so placed that "the prospect can frequently be dispensed with to great advantage." The thing to do was to change to stained glass—"white ground glass alternating with panes of crimson make a very pretty window," and it also shut out the gross sights of the city. If this cost too much, the aesthetic housewife could paste thin muslin, decorated with ferns, autumn leaves or pressed flowers, across the panes of glass.

## 8

It was the Aesthetes' enthusiasm for bric-a-brac which, in some minds, had influenced American dress more than had any other detail of the movement. Bric-a-brac seemed to have inspired the eccentric convolutions women obtained in gowns. However, the staid *Nation* had on January 26th declared that "the aesthetic movement has already produced, for good or evil, effect in woman's dress." What annoyed the editor was the attempt of Oscar Wilde, and one of his disciples, an artist who had been writing to the *New York Evening Post*, to introduce color and short pants into male dress.

Such a reform, to *The Nation*, was an anachronism, since the clothes of French and English gentlemen had been full of color and knee breeches for two centuries, in fact clear up to the arrival of the age of steam and of railroads. From that revolutionary moment, the dark dress coat "began its triumphal progress all over the world. Display of any kind is foreign to our modern notion of the perfectly well-bred man, but display in women we expect and like. Democracy is against the aristocratic beaux. Time, in the modern community, has a commercial value." . . . Beaux in other ages killed time as a profession, and could afford elegance.

The *Chicago Times* was seeing the problem similarly: "When gentlemen had nothing to do, they could afford to dress in a manner that would drive a woman wild with envy." Men in the industrial age needed costumes which could be rapidly changed.

The British aesthetic opposition to prodigal use of jewelry was praised by many fashion arbiters in America, though they tolerated if

not encouraged the wholesale bespangling of women's dresses and coats with shining metal buttons in 1882.

Worth, the Parisian designer and "high priest of the Goddess Fashion," was in January, 1882, declaring most sensationally to a European correspondent of the *Boston Transcript* that "very stylish ladies discard all jewelry in street toilets, not even wearing earrings and bracelets or bangles on the outside of wrinkle-wristed gloves." He was announcing that stuffed birds were to be in high favor "worn on the left shoulder with a cluster of flowers on evening dresses and they also find cozy quarters on dainty opera muffs."

The *Transcript* correspondent had thrown up to Monsieur Worth the thing that was in many forms apparent all over the United States—the triumph of British over French ideas. Even in fashion, the traditional dominance of Paris had been challenged by the emergence of two items which American women had adopted to such an extent that the *Transcript* reporter suggested to Worth that the conquest might be invading Paris itself.

"Do not the Parisians wear Mother Hubbard coats and large Kate Greenaway hats?"

The oracle, nettled by mention of these English innovations, replied tartly:

"Not at all. The genteel people wear very small bonnets. Yes, it is true the figured stuffs are the mode, but I intend to bring in plain stuffs at once. I am tired of these mixed and figured things which are so horribly imitated by women who put together all their old duds without rhyme or reason and fancy themselves *comme il faut*. No! No! Paris has not become ridiculous yet. As to Mother Hubbard, she is an imagination; the English have tried to make her a reality."

An admiration for things British had arisen in America during the past decade—an admiration that grew each day. Of New York clubmen, a Broadway correspondent wrote the *Chicago Daily News*:

"To be thought English is their chief delight—to part their hair and their names in the middle, wear coats too small for them, and carry their arms like half-paralyzed apes, toddle along the street in trousers so small it's a wonder how they get into them, and conduct themselves generally in a tipsy, halting, semi-idiotic manner, sickening to every healthy intellect."

On January 5th, three days after Oscar Wilde's arrival, *The Nation* deplored "the Anglomania which has done so much to change the social tone of New York. Society here has always been more or less imitative, and whereas down to about the time of the Civil War it imitated Paris, it now imitates London."

"To be English today is to be in good form. . . . Not long ago the New York swell had a French tailor, a French bootmaker, and cultivated French manners. Old New Year's Day was much more nearly French than it was English. It was sociable, democratic, and something or other remotely resembling it prevailed in Paris." Few people any more kept up the tradition of New Year's calls; "the custom was ob-

viously one which anyone who wished to be regarded as English must look upon with suspicion and dislike . . . a custom so obviously unsuited to London must be given up in New York."



"LADY'S PALETOT"

*"They must compress themselves into the shape of insects by the use of corsets." The picture is of a "lady's paletot." "Godey's Lady's Book,"*

*May, 1882.*

his grave embittered. It had been French republicanism more than any British liberalism that Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine had employed to capture the great mass of Americans. And as time had gone, the stature of that slim young guest-soldier, the Marquis de Lafayette, had grown into an American legend of material influence. In 1824 when Congress had invited him to revisit the United States, a new wave of love for France had developed.

He had come, in his sixty-eighth year, had been given tempestuous welcome at all kinds of receptions and mass meetings, the whole visit culminating in Congress's vote to award him \$200,000 and 24,000 acres.

In Ohio, little boys had been taught that "French gentlemen take small steps." Gallic elegance could be obtained, it was said, without

The British caste system was supplanting French republicanism and democracy in America's social world. Before the 1870s, fashions, male and female had been more Gallic than British, because Americans had felt friendlier toward the people who had fought in their ranks for liberty than they felt toward the people with whom they had had two wars. Paris, sartorially, politically, romantically, had been nearer than London to America. French models in philosophy, government and manners had so captured the Americans, especially the Westerners, that George Washington, the admirer of British ways in many details, had gone to

loss of the democratic ideal. Girls on plantations and even in merely comfortable farm surroundings learned to read French. The United States Army clung to French military terms and names, and the great Napoleon had been the model for American officers.

A change had begun in the 1860's when the Prince of Wales, visiting America, had profoundly influenced seaboard society, and when France had violated the Monroe Doctrine by setting up a Hapsburg empire in Mexico. Soon after, the United States Army had frightened the French troops home. Napoleon III, whose social régime in Paris had been the fashionable ideal in America, fell under the heel of Germany, and his reign ended in a revolution which had spread dread of the Commune through the industrial world.

It was the Commune's threat to the reign of American industry that had been far more influential than the Mexican insult in hastening the end of French influence in the New World. It did not matter that the Commune of 1871 had died weakly, giving place to a republic far closer to the spirit of the original American republic than any government in the world. The dominant financiers of the United States in the 1870's and early '80's thought of strikes and riots when they thought of France.

To them England, with its entrenched nobility, its serene gentry, was far worthier of emulation, and this belief spread and took deeper root as the inpouring hordes of European unskilled labor gave new groups of Americans the idea of caste. In the work of regimenting labor to industry, and to spur it ever onward to catch up to machines in efficiency, American employers had more to learn from England than from France, for France still stubbornly refused to regard efficiency as a virtue.

America's Anglomania was not all of its own making. Propagandists had been busy. The ruling class of England had opposed the Federal Government so long as there was hope of the Confederacy winning, during the Civil War, but when the Lincoln Administration had emerged in 1865 triumphant with the largest army—and what was more to the point, a huge fleet that had revolutionized naval warfare—Great Britain had set out to establish friendship. Charles Dickens's second lecture tour of America in 1867-68 had helped the cause. England, too, had paid promptly—almost cordially—when a neutral court had decided it owed Americans damage for merchantmen sunk by the Confederate raider, the *Alabama*, which had been built in British yards.

To persuade the all-powerful Northern victors, after the war, that British hostility had been largely a fiction, Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, and William Arthur, the British divine, had written a series of articles for the *New York Tribune*, and Spencer now, in

1882, was preparing to make America a good-will visit, for which his friend, the British-born steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie, was drumming up interest.

Two social events had fixed America's social eyes on London—the kingly honors showered upon ex-President and Mrs. Grant during their visit in 1879, and the marriage, in 1874, of Miss Jennie Jerome, daughter of a Wall Street broker, to Lord Randolph Churchill.

America's imitation of England had spread so far by 1877 that it was said nine-tenths of the people who had taken up the new fad of eye-glasses did so only to be able to give "a strong British stare." And the fondness for British names in popular fiction could have been seen by Wilde in *Godey's* for March: "The shaft of misfortune reached her, moreover, as the sting of an asp from a garland of orange blossoms, and no one dreaming, least of all Annette Chauncey herself, that the venom of death had entered her breast with the marriage vow of Lancey Leroy."

## 10

There was under way "an American invasion of England purely female in character," as an anonymous British writer, eventually accepted as Oscar Wilde, himself, wrote in a London periodical.

The contrast between American men and American women abroad interested Wilde, the women "making our beauties jealous by their clever wit," the men, as he had seen them in Italy, "wandering about in a melancholy manner, treating the Old World as if it were a Broadway store and each city a counter for the sampling of shoddy goods. . . . He thinks that civilization began with the introduction of steam, and looks with contempt upon all centuries that had no hot-water apparatuses in their houses. The ruin and decay of time has no pathos in his eyes. He turns away from Ravenna because the grass grows in her streets, and can see no loveliness in Verona because there is rust on her balconies. His one desire is to get the whole of Europe into thorough repair . . . he is so utilitarian that he is absolutely impractical. . . . Finally, having looked at everything and seen nothing, he returns to his native land.

"There he is delightful. For the strange thing about American civilization is that the women are most charming when they are away from their own country, the men most charming when they are at home.

"At home, the American man is the best of companions, as he is the most hospitable of hosts. The young men are especially pleasant, with their bright, handsome eyes, their unwearying energy, their amusing shrewdness. They seem to get a hold on life much earlier than we do.

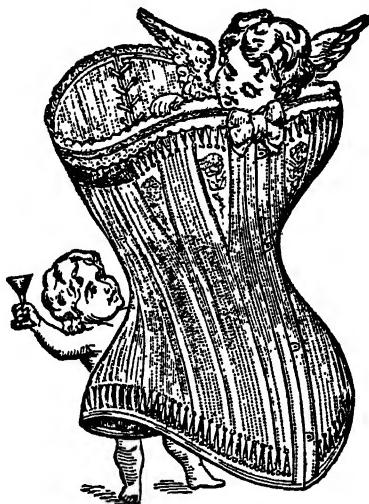
At an age when we are still boys at Eton, or lads at Oxford, they are practicing some important profession, making money in some intricate business. Real experience comes to them so much sooner than it does to us that they are never awkward, never shy, and never say foolish things except when they ask one how the Hudson River compares with the Rhine, or whether Brooklyn Bridge is not really more impressive than the dome at St. Paul’s. . . . Bulk is their canon of beauty and size their standard of excellence. . . . Their education is quite different from ours. They know men much better than they know books, and life interests them more than literature. They have no time to study anything but the stock markets, no leisure to read anything but newspapers. Indeed, it is only the women in America who have any leisure at all; and, as a necessary result of this curious state of things, there is no doubt but that, within a century from now, the whole culture of the New World will be in petticoats.”

As Oscar Wilde contrasted America with Europe, he saw it to be a heaven for what was, in British slang, “the soft sex.”

“On the whole, the great success of marriage in the States is due partly to the fact that no American man is ever idle and partly to the fact that no American wife is considered responsible for the quality of her husband’s dinners. In America, the horrors of domesticity are almost entirely unknown.”

The Yankee habit of living in hotels and boarding-houses did away “with any necessity for those hideous *têtes-à-têtes* that are the dream of engaged couples and the despair of married men.” *Table d’hôte* meals might be vulgar, he said, but they were “at least better than that eternal duologue about bills and babies to which Benedict and Beatrice so often sink when the one has lost her wit and the other her beauty.”

Wilde was not offended, as so many Englishmen had been, at the relative prevalence of divorce in America, nor at the agitation of women-reformers for still more liberal divorce laws. “Even the American



CORSET, CUPID, AND INFANT

*Warner Brothers’ Coraline Corset, an advertisement often inserted in “The Youth’s Companion” during 1881 and 1882.*

freedom of divorce," he commented, "questionable though it undoubtedly is on many grounds, has at least the merit of bringing into marriage a new element of romantic uncertainty. When people are tied together for life they too often regard manners as a mere superfluity and courtesy as a thing of no moment; but where the bond can easily be broken, its very fragility makes its strength and reminds the husband that he should always try to be pleasing, and the wife that she should never cease to be charming."

Either because of or in spite of this freedom of action, Wilde thought scandals extremely rare in America, "and should one occur, so paramount in society is female influence that it is the man who is never forgiven. America is the only country in the world where *Don Juan* is not appreciated."

American men were, he concluded, docile domestic creatures. "If the English girl ever met him, she would marry him; and if she married him, she would be happy. For, though he may be rough in manner and deficient in the picturesque insincerity of romance, yet he is invariably kind and thoughtful, and has succeeded in making his own country the Paradise of Women.

"This, however, is perhaps why, like Eve, the women are always so anxious to get out of it."

## 2

### "WILD OSCAR, THE ASS-THETE"

WESTWARD Oscar came up the Hudson, through Albany, striking for a swift conquest of Utica, Rochester, Buffalo—a day in each city, his affairs now in the hands of J. H. Vale, whom Colonel Morse had hired to make the long railroad trip with the lecturer. A Negro valet was also provided, since Morse was anxious that Oscar be happy on the tour which would not halt until it had included Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis.

Utica, storm-wrapped, welcomed him on February 6th with newspaper headlines describing how he descended "from his pedestal of daffodils" and came into contact "with Oneida County snowbanks." The *Weekly Herald* told its readers he looked like "a diluted Theodore Tilton," while a woman correspondent thought he resembled George

Eliot. After his lecture, which was sponsored by the Utica Household Art Rooms, he was given a reception at the home of ex-Mayor Hutchinson, and visited the Art Rooms next day, followed by many citizens who heard him “alternately praising and criticizing” the household art objects on view.

He left with Utica repeating and sending out to spread over the country his remark, made to a reporter of the town, “You call America a country, but I call it a w-o-r-l-d.”

## 2

Rochester was more excited by his approach, for in this city of 90,000 people was the university, named for the town, which held some youths far livelier than the Baptist faculty and trustees wished them to be. What they would do to eclipse the Harvard boys was a matter for conjecture. The city's newspapers chronicled what Wilde had done in the East and what editors East and West were saying of him. They told how a Chicago advertiser was publishing things about “Wild Oscar, or Balaam the Ass-thete.” Also they printed a spurious letter from Wilde, dated at Buffalo, February 2nd, accepting an invitation to the Rochester Maennerchor Masquerade on the night of his lecture. Wilde was not in Buffalo that day, and the fraud was revealed when a man, made up to resemble him, postured among the Maennerchor masqueraders, at their affair, dancing with the “Too Utterly Too Too Club” which was made up of “aesthetic maidens.”

Oscar, arriving in Rochester late in the afternoon of the 7th, seemed piqued with Americans; he had an injured tone as he said to a reporter from the *Democrat and Chronicle*, “I know that I am right, that I have a mission to perform. I am indestructible! Shelley was driven out of England, but he wrote equally well in Italy. It was not he that was injured—it was the people. I cannot expect—I do not wish—better treatment than Keats and Shelley received.” He spoke of Americans who had been received courteously in England and then added, “How would it have appeared had we accused Booth of blackmail, as I was accused in Baltimore?”

The reporter, trying to get more jocular quotations, asked what Oscar had to say about the prizefight taking place that day, down in Mississippi, between John L. Sullivan and Paddy Ryan. Oscar laughed and began, “Even that has its artistic side. You know, the ancient Greeks—”

But Vale interrupted. It was lecture time, unfortunately, too, for

Wilde, since the Rochester University boys were not to be so easily baffled in their burlesque as had been the lampooners at Harvard.

Several score of them sat in the gallery of the Opera House, and, as a correspondent of the *New York Herald* wrote his paper, they were organized to interrupt Wilde's lecture "by a running fire of hisses, groans, and hootings which compelled the lecturer to pause more than a dozen times when the hullabaloo became so noisy that the Aesthete's voice could not be heard. He would stop, fold his arms across his breast and look calmly at his tormentors, but he evidently thought discretion the better part of valor and made no comments on the annoyance."

But there was worse to come.

"When the lecturer had proceeded about a quarter of an hour, an old darkey dressed in a swallow-tailed coat, one white kid glove and a bouquet of flowers as big as a peck measure, walked down the central aisle with many antics and grimaces, à la Bunthorne, and took a front seat. This was the students' work, and the entrance of the darkey was the signal for a great burst of applause, which ended in guffaws, cat-calls and other specimens of collegiate amusement. A great many people became disgusted and left the hall.

"Before the close of the lecture a policeman attempted to eject one of the disturbers, when a general gallery mêlée ensued, which was made more interesting by the turning off of the gas. The manager of the house then sent for more policemen, but before they arrived, most of the students had left, and Oscar finished his lecture before a few people who had remained more to see the fun than to hear the lecturer."

### 3

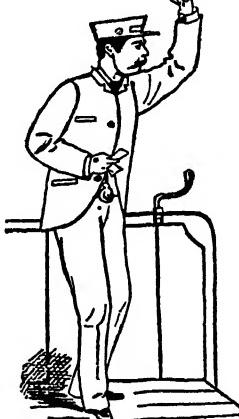
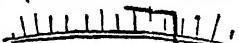
Placid Rochester was shocked. Its *Union and Advertiser* next day headed a comment with "Rochester's Deep Disgrace," and roasted the conduct of the students as that which "would be considered the height of boorishness at a country singing school or spelling match. . . . Their contemptible conduct had not even the merit of originality." Manager Gobay, of the Opera House, was criticized for having neither ejected nor prosecuted them. At the same time, the Rochester papers declared that the *New York Herald* dispatch—which had gone all over the country via Associated Press—contained exaggerations. There were not a hundred students involved, this post mortem had it; there was no "general mêlée," the gas was not turned out; few people left the hall. It was admitted that a policeman in the gallery had to use his whip once; but the "expressions of disapproval were given in the usual manner." Vale lent a hand by agreeing that the accounts were exag-

gerated. "The boys were a little demonstrative, but there was no malicious attempt to create a disturbance," he was quoted as saying.

The truth, most observers thought, lay between the two versions; and

## "Hoss-Car Wilde" SUITS,

Or the Very Latest "To Utter" Styles for Railroad Men, at



A. J. NUTTING & CO'S.

Our Overcoats are still walking off like things of life. Wherever we go a customer as well as a passer-by is bound to "Look up" at them. They are made of careful buyers, and accordingly the purveyor have in view, via Chicago, our great campaign.

Already the Railroads are coming in.

**104 & 106  
MADISON ST.**



## Wild "Oscar;" Or, Balaam, the Ass-thete, A TAIL OF A COAT.

By the author of *Muggins on the Lake Front*.

Also other new and amusing COAT TAILS at Willoughby, Hill & Co., corner Madison and Clark sts.

### JUST MADE UP:

25 new patterns of Spring Overcoats, price \$7.50 to \$18; modest, neat wide-fitting, and very reasonable in price.

1,200 new early Spring Suits, just what is needed now, and the prices are \$10, \$12, \$14, \$16, \$18, \$20.

### PANTS DOWN AGAIN!

Willoughby, Hill & Co., 1,000 yards,

"in a mix'd lot of 50 sets, to \$2 each pair."

Don't buy "anything" without first seeing our new goods and low prices.

Open *107 State at night*.

### FEATURE ADVERTISEMENTS

*Advertisements capitalizing on Wilde's visit to Chicago, and published in the "Chicago Times" during February, 1882.*

it was concluded by many that the man who had walked down the aisle in costume was not a Negro, but a whitewasher named Peter Craig, who lived near the lime kiln. However, the Rochester student episode became another Oscar Wilde issue, pro and con. In distant cities the disorder was both reported and denounced. The *Chicago Daily News*

gave Oscar the worst of it, declaring that American audiences were usually kind and polite, and they had a right to interrupt a speaker if they chose, since they had paid more for the space they occupied than had the lecturer. There ought to be "some mode of assuring this self-announced apostle of intellectual asininity and imbecility that he amounts to nothing."

## 4

As the tale sped across the country, Joaquin Miller threw down the *New York Herald* and reached for a pen. He had met Wilde at the home of Mrs. Marion Fortesque in New York, liked the boy, and now wrote him:

"109 West 33 Street,  
New York, February 9, 1882.

"MY DEAR OSCAR WILDE:—

"I read with shame about the behavior of those ruffians at Rochester at your lecture there. When I see such things here in the civilized portion of my country and read the coarse comments of the Philistine Press, I feel like thanking God that my home lies three thousand miles further on, and in what is called the wilderness. Should you get as far as Oregon in your travels, go to my father's. You will find rest there and room, as much land as you can encompass in a day's ride, and I promise you there the respect due a stranger to our shores, to your attainments, your industry, and your large, generous, and tranquil nature. Or should you decide to return here and not bear further abuse, come to my housetop and abide with me, where you will be welcome and loved as a brother. And bear this in mind, my dear boy, the more you are abused, the more welcome you will be. For I remember how kind your country was to me, and at your age I had not done one-tenth your work. May my right hand fail me when I forget this. But don't you lose heart or come to dislike America. For whatever is said or done, the real heart of this strong young world demands and will have fair play for all. This sentiment is deep and substantial and will show itself when appealed to. So go ahead, my brave youth, and say your say if you choose. My heart is with you and so are the hearts of the best of America's millions.

"Thine for the Beautiful and True,

"JOAQUIN MILLER."

This letter finally reached Wilde on his circuit. He found time when he was in St. Louis to reply:

“St. Louis, February 28, 1882.

“MY DEAR JOAQUIN MILLER:—

“I thank you for your chivalrous and courteous letter. Believe me, I would as lief judge of the strength and splendor of sun and sea by the dust that dances in the beam and the bubble that breaks on the wave, as take the petty and profitless vulgarity of one or two insignificant towns as any test or standard of the real spirit of a sane, strong, and simple people, or allow it to affect my respect for the many noble men or women whom it has been my privilege in this great country to know.

“For myself and the cause which I represent, I have no fears as regards the future. Slander and folly have their way for a season, but for a season only, while, as touching either the few provincial newspapers which have so vainly assailed me, or that ignorant and itinerant libeler of New England who goes lecturing from village to village in such open and ostentatious isolation, be sure I have no time to waste on them! Youth being so glorious, art so godlike, and the very world about us so full of beautiful things, and things worthy of reverence, and things honorable, how should one stop to listen to the lucubrations of a literary *gamin*, to the brawling and mouthing of a man whose praise would be as insolent as his slander is impotent, or to the irresponsible and irrepressible chatter of the professionally unproductive?

“ ’Tis a great advantage, I admit, to have done nothing, but one must not abuse even that advantage!

“Who after all, that I should write of him, is this scribbling anonymous in grand old Massachusetts, who scrawls and screams so glibly about what he cannot understand?—this apostle of inhospitality, who delights to defile, to desecrate and to defame the gracious courtesies he is unworthy to enjoy? Who are these scribes, who, passing with purposeless alacrity from the police news to the Parthenon, and from crime to criticism, sway with such serene incapacity the office which they so lately swept? ‘Narcissuses of imbecility,’ what should they see in the clear waters of Beauty and in the well undefiled of Truth but the shifting and shadowy image of their own substantial stupidity? Secure of that oblivion for which they toil so laboriously, and, I must acknowledge, with such success, let them peer at us through their telescopes and report what they like of us. But, my dear Joaquin, should we put them under the microscope there would be really nothing to be seen.

“I look forward to passing another delightful evening with you on my return to New York, and I need not tell you that whenever you visit England you will be received with that courtesy with which it is our

pleasure always to welcome all Americans, and that honor with which it is our privilege to greet all poets.

"Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

"OSCAR WILDE."

Many readers of this letter felt sure that the man referred to as a "scribbling anonymuncle" was Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

5

While Rochester berated its bad boys, Wilde passed to Buffalo where, as if to seem kind by contrast, the lake city was preparing to do the Londoner honor. Its university boys would cut no capers, its newspapers would not deride him.

As a matter of fact, Buffalo was being very good on general principles, for its mayor, a heavily set, large-mustached man of courage, by the name of Grover Cleveland, was cleansing political stables most thoroughly, and Buffalo was anxious that he be nominated for governor of the State by the reform Democrats.

Local aesthetes had labored hard to make the Academy of Music suitable for the lecturer when he would appear on the afternoon of the 8th. The stage was heaped with old gold hangings, Florentine velvet, brazen chains, bronze plaques, ebony cabinets, faïence vases, a pedestal bearing the bronze head of another traveler, Odysseus, a bronze miniature of the Discobolus, an easel bearing a borrowed plaque, a stand of Japanese lances, "a magnificently wrought shield," Persian carpets, and "screens of black, embroidered after the most approved method of the day."

The *Buffalo Courier* thought "the setting rich in the extreme, if a little bizarre, and it is much to be doubted if Mr. Wilde has been more artistically environed at any time since he has commenced lecturing on this side of the Atlantic. "It also noted how the auditorium and balcony, when Wilde came upon the stage, "were filled with as brilliant an assemblage as has been there for a long time. The very cream of Buffalo society was represented."

All morning, Oscar had been revising his "English Renaissance" lecture in a room at the Tiff House—and when he spoke the address showed the results. The *Courier* reporter saw Oscar "advance to the reading desk promptly at the moment announced, recognizing the truth of the old maxim, '*L'exactitude est la politesse des rois.*' There was just a suspicion of a titter on the part of some of the young in the auditory, but it died before it was born. As a matter of course, he did not appear

in evening dress—that is, his evening dress as was expected. He wore a short after-dinner jacket of fawn-colored velvet trimmed with silk braid of a shade lighter, and a vest of the same material. His trousers were of a thick rough gray English cloth, cut straight from hip to foot and touching the ground. His shoes were of patent leather, very low, tied with ribbon and coming to a point at the middle of the toes. His cravat and handkerchief were of faded damask, rose shade. His long chestnut hair, parted in the middle, was pushed back of his ears and fell well down upon his coat collar, somewhat after the style depicted by Burne-Jones when treating of angels.

“His manuscript was bound in a handsome case of brown baby-alligator hide, lined with rich blue satin, and while he turned the leaves as he went on, it was plainly to be seen that he was speaking largely from memory. His style is un-oratorical, but quiet, self-contained, and effective as far as his voice reaches in its fullness. His language is fine; he is master of good and melodious English; and his thought is presented with a clearness and beauty that fairly captivate the intellect. His movements are somewhat stiff and his general method reminds one of an unpliant sermonizer delivering a discourse. But all he has to say is manly, strong, and fine; there is nothing of mere affectation whatever about him and there can be no doubt about his sincerity.”

Oscar’s plea for making art the basis of a united and happy national life was heard with close attention, especially at one point when he gave an elaborated version of how Ruskin had influenced him and others—the same story that he had told to the Boston audience, but more in detail, as taken down by the *Courier’s* stenographic reporter:

“One summer afternoon in Oxford, that sweet city with its dreaming spires, lovely as Venice in its splendor, noble in its learning as Rome—down the long High Street that winds from tower to tower, past silent cloister and stately gateway, until threading that long seven-arch bridge which St. Mary used to guard (used to, I say, because they are now pulling it down to build a tramway and a light cast-iron bridge in its place)—well, we were coming down the street, a troop of young men, some of them, like myself, only nineteen, going to the river or tennis court or cricket field, when Ruskin, going up to lecture in cap and gown, met us and seemed troubled, and prayed us to go back with him to his lecture, which a few of us did. And there he spoke to us, not on art this time, but on life, saying that it seemed to him to be wrong that all the best physique and strength of the young men of England should be spent aimlessly on the cricket ground or without any result at all, except that if one rowed well he got the pewter pot, and if one made a good score, a case-handled bat. He thought, he said, we ought to work

at something, that is, to do good to other people; do something by which we might show that in all labor there was something noble.

"We were a good deal moved and said we would do anything he wished. So he went out around Oxford and found two villages, upper and lower Stickney; and between them there lay a good swamp, so that people could not pass from one to the other without many miles of a round. When we came back in the winter he asked us to help him make a good road across this morass for these people to use. So out we went, day by day, and learned how to lay levels and dig and break stone and to wheel barrows along a plank. Ruskin worked with us in the mist and the rain of an Oxford winter, and our friends and enemies came out and mocked us, but we did not mind them much, and we do not mind it since at all, but worked away for two months at that road.

"And I felt that if there was enough spirit among the young men to go out to such work as road-making for the sake of a noble ideal of life, I could from them create an artistic movement that might change, as it has changed, the face of England. So I sought them out—leader they would call me, but there was no leader, we were all searchers only, and we were bound to each other by noble friendship and noble art. . . . Well, we have done something in England and we will do something more."

Perhaps these and other parts of the lecture were delivered monotonously, as audiences so often complained, but the *Courier* did not say so. The deprecatory remarks came from Oscar himself when, talking to newspapermen after the lecture, he praised the "refined and cultivated audience," and said, "This is a very great comfort to me, for I need not tell you that I have not the gift of oratory. Indeed, public speaking as an art is not cultivated in England. Besides, I am not a good judge of the force of my own voice; very few men are." He added that "honestly criticized, I may have been shown my weaknesses."

In this comfortable and gentle mood, Oscar took the 6:10 p.m. train for Niagara Falls.

## 6

The Falls, like the Atlantic Ocean, were to tangle Wilde in the cross-currents of American ridicule.

No one heard him mention those annoyances which had roused many another traveler to complain—the almost savage greed of hackmen; the exorbitant charges to see the sights; the numerous booths, shops, shell-games, gimcrack stores selling stuffed birds, gaudily colored glassware, and souvenirs; the avid photographers who sought to rope in travelers to be portrayed against a false cataract background. The

honeymooners were being taken in, but not Oscar. Those newlyweds crowding the hotels, the walks, the Falls themselves, drew Wilde's amusement, and soon, to Britishers, he would say of the resort: “Every American bride is taken there, and the sight of the stupendous waterfall must be one of the earliest, if not the keenest, disappointments in American married life.”

After registering at the Prospect House on the Canadian side, Wilde spent Friday morning pacing the hotel veranda and gazing across at the cataracts. “Impressive tableau!” observed the *New York Tribune*. “Here, Oscar Wilde in his long fur coat; there, Niagara Falls!”

After a time, Wilde and Vale ordered a carriage, drove over the comparatively new suspension bridge, alighted for a view of the American Falls, then went on to Goat Island and to the points of vantage overlooking the Horseshoe. In their winter dress, the cataracts confronted them; torrents of water flowing, forming gorgeous crystal festoons of frozen spray. The “ice bridge” was at its best.

Poet and agent stood on Table Rock, and at that point Oscar Wilde, as Dickens and all others had been, was overwhelmed by the beauty of the iridescent waters. He and Vale put on oilskins and went under the Falls—a comparatively precarious journey. (Reporters wrote their papers that Oscar refused to don the oilskins until he learned that Sarah Bernhardt had done so.) The two travelers crossed the ice bridge, their guide, Jack Conboy, later telling newspapermen that “he never before heard anyone take on so about a lot of ice.” Conboy said he felt “certain that Mr. Wilde is determined to commit the usual folly of writing a piece about the ice-bridge and the Falls.”

But the comments of this unusual visitor, when he released them that evening at dinner, were far from the expected. The *Niagara Falls Gazette* understood him to say:

“When I first saw Niagara Falls, I was disappointed in the outline. The design, it seemed to me, was wanting in grandeur and variety of line, but the colors were beautiful. The dull gray waters, flecked with green, are lit with silver, being full of changing loveliness; for of all the most lovely colors are colors in motion. It was not till I stood beneath the Falls at Table Rock that I realized the majestic splendor and strength of the physical force of nature here.

“The sight was far beyond what I had ever seen in Europe. It seems a sort of embodiment of Pantheism. I thought of what Leonardo da Vinci said once, that the two most wonderful things in the world are a woman's smile and the motion of mighty waters.”

Just before he left, he wrote in the hotel album, “The roar of these

waters is like the roar when the mighty wave of democracy breaks on shores where kings lie couched in ease."

The poet's remarks, made just after his sight-seeing trip and recorded at once by the local newspaper, were what he had really said about Niagara. But it was the phrase, "when I first saw Niagara Falls I was disappointed in the outline" which produced a journalistic uproar. Editors linked this with Oscar's disappointment with the Atlantic. America was offended. The *New York Tribune* hastened to say, "It may now be recorded that as a show, Niagara takes precedence over the Atlantic Ocean. Mr. Oscar Wilde, who has gone over both of them with the eye of a critic, pronounces decidedly in favor of the Falls." The editorial harped again on Oscar's supposed criticism of the ocean, citing that "Lord Byron had entirely different views." It was odd that Oscar had liked Walt Whitman—"the heart of the poet of the lily went out toward the poet of the armpits"—better than Niagara. "What the Falls thought of him will probably never be known. . . . The Falls, so far as we know, kept on falling."

As he proceeded on his way westward, Wilde encountered in every city, in the interviews with newspapermen, in the papers he read, in drawing-rooms too, challenges based upon his casual remark that "at first he was disappointed." It was widely said that he had criticized a work of God and that the Creator would not notice him. To this he replied that he could not imagine the Creator caring who criticized his works.

He was westward bound next day, to Chicago. The *New York Tribune* flicked him with sarcasm, directed against not only him but the Western city: "Having seen the embodiment of Pantheism at Niagara," wrote the editor, "he may find the embodiment of Altruism at Chicago."

## 3

### CHICAGO, THE "WINDY"

A DAY'S journey, and then came the rambunctious, fast-growing somewhat ramshackle metropolis of the Central West.

Oscar reached it after dark. Twinkling lights in Indiana farmhouses, glimpses of sullen way-stations, were replaced by hints of the great city. Shadows of factories and grain elevators stood black against a

lesser blackness. The traveler could feel, rather than see, the presence, close by the train, of an immense inland ocean; for he was passing the southernmost curve of Lake Michigan. In the night, and in its winter mood, it was a spectral sea, shrouded in light fog and breathing mystery.

In a short time, through the train windows were cast scarlet and purple flares from huge forges; from the molten hearts of steel works—the South Chicago plants recently opened. The closed car windows, however, would not admit that other thing so definitely Chicagoan—the "stockyards smell," which in summer was apt to assail travelers entering the city limits. The foul breath from rendering vats was considered by the city natural, inevitable, and, by some, even healthful.

Oscar's train began to rattle over switch-points and to run warily across streets as dismal as those of East London, if not worse. Then it entered areas a little better lighted and more cheerful. And at length it drew in slowly at a terminal bordered by slums, its shed roaring with escaping steam, its exterior surrounded by hacks, by barkers for hotels, by rat-faced men seeking to trap immigrants, by shrieking newsboys and whining beggars.

There was in all this a poem for a realist, but for an Oscar Wilde little but shudders.

Poems! An amateur of the art had just burst into print, in the penny sheet, the *Daily News*, run by Victor F. Lawson and Melville E. Stone, with this:

He comes! The simpering Oscar comes.  
The West awaits with wonder  
As bull-frogs list to beating drums  
Or hearken to the thunder.

The women pause with bated breath,  
With *Wild* and wistful faces,  
And silent as the halls of death  
Seem all our public places.

He comes with words sublimely dull,  
In garb superbly silly,  
To tell us of the beautiful,  
The sunflower and the lily.

Behold him here among you now.  
Oh, how divinely utter!  
His sensual chin, his narrow brow,  
His brains like April butter.

Here in the energetic West  
We have no vacant niches  
For clowns with pansies in the vest  
Or dadoes on the breeches.

We do not live by form or rule,  
We love our wives and lassies;  
We like to look at Western mules,  
But not aesthetic asses.

## 2

The victim of such doggerel was taken tenderly to the Grand Pacific Hotel, which had attractions for many of the artistic visitors to the West. It was a comforting place after the racket, the rough and ill-lighted streets, and the general hubbub of the approach. It gleamed with more lamps than many Western inns could afford, and would soon, the bellboys said, have the electric lights which the Edison Company had, last October, begun to install in commercial houses. Marshall Field's basement would have bulbs burning within a month, and the Palmer House within two months.

The Grand Pacific bellboys spoke of the huge lounge, the shops, the dining-room with seven bronze chandeliers, the wine cellar. They boasted of their employer, John B. Drake, the small-town Ohio tavern youth who was now famous for what he had done with big-town hostelries, inventing "game dinners," starting the custom of putting flowers on tables in the dining-room, perfecting an American technique for receiving celebrities. Each of Drake's clerks was a Lorenzo the Magnificent.

By eight o'clock the petted Aesthete found himself in a suite lately occupied by Patti, and devouring a dinner of brook trout, broiled quail, steak, and sweets, with which went champagne. Oscar remarked of this last that he "never thought such good wine could be obtained so far West." He was disappointed, however, in Drake's lack of Turkish cigarettes.

But the poet could not long sit before his leaping wood fire. He must work. And the work was to receive the morning newspapermen. If he was weary of this endless chore he gave no sign. The *Inter Ocean* reporter found that the poet had a hand-clasp "like the clinging of a vine"; a gracious smile, a "voice full and round, affecting one like a sea shell held to the ear." Oscar, in the absence of those Turkish cigarettes, was smoking a cigar! He handled it "with the grace of long

practice." Drake's Lorenzos had set the stage for him very nicely—a large sofa pulled up before the fire, with a wolf-skin and a tiger-skin draped over it; and where Oscar's head had reposed, before he rose to greet the reporters, a silk shawl colored in old gold.



A FLURRY IN WHEAT

*Sketched in the Chicago Board of Trade and published in "Harper's New Monthly Magazine," October, 1880.*

As the reporters fired questions and jotted down the answers their notebooks began to fill with Wilde's epigrams that were sure of space in tomorrow's papers:

"I am struck by the type of civilization definitely American created by yourselves and for yourselves."

"One production of Michael Angelo is worth a hundred by Edison."

"Life without industry is barren, and industry without art is barbarism."

"You in America need more noble architecture." Then as if to combat the sneers of the new-rich Yankees at colonial houses, he added, "The old red-brick houses which your Puritan forefathers built for you are more beautiful than the sham Greek porticos of Fifth Avenue."

The sins of industrialism were strong in his nostrils, yet he was trying to reconcile machinery with aesthetics and said, "I am not really against steam engines. One of Turner's best paintings was a picture of an express train. But of what use is it to a man to travel sixty miles an hour? He travels awhile, and then stops. Is he any the better for it? Why, a fool can buy a railway ticket and travel sixty miles an hour. Is he any the less a fool?"

In Chicago, which had been made by the railroads, and which had surrendered its waterfront to one of them with thanks, the reporters sardonically took down all this *lèse-majesté*.

Falling into his lecture vein, Wilde continued:

"We Europeans feel that with your wonderful climate, the strong, healthy physique of your men and women, and the quick enthusiasm of life among you, you should be most noble artists. Up to this time, you have had much to contend with. You have had to conquer nature and to conquer your enemies. You have done both in a shorter time than any nation ever did before. There comes now a period of peace with you, a period for protection, for a more widely spread civilization. You have time yet to produce it. All the wonderful material inventions which make life easier and wider for you, the steam engine, the telegraph, and the like, are noble or not, entirely in the spirit in which you use them. The problem of modern life is how, with all these wonderful inventions, far greater than even Greek or Italian ever dreamed of, you can create a civilization greater or even as great as theirs."

The hour was late, but there was one thing more. What about Ireland?

Upon the "Madonna-like" face the fire cast a ruddier glow as "Sperranza's" son declared: "Ireland is the Niobe among nations. The noblest of materials for a great nation there were wrecked by the folly of England."

And so, good night. He would awaken in the morning to read headlines like this:

SAINT OSCAR DE WILDE  
ARRIVES, LILIES AND  
ALL IN CHICAGO

## 3

Chicago was well aware that he had come. The word had spread from the hotel out into the street. The colored valet assigned to him, the carriage-starter at the door, the waiters, were busy telling the world who he was. When he stepped forth in his greenish ulster to see the town, there were loungers who inquired: "What's that? Something of Barnum's?"

"No, it's Oscar Wilde."

"The hell you say!"

There were mutterings about his flowing locks.

Seeing Chicago had its routine, if a proud citizen guide were along: "We've had the biggest fire. We lifted the city five feet out of the mud. We made a river run uphill."

Wilde was duly impressed with the number of telephones, and heard how a fellow Briton, doing business in America, had said that the comparatively undeveloped device had saved him \$8,000 in a year, not to speak of time and worry. He saw the city's first cable car, which had been given its maiden run on State Street two weeks before, with Mayor Carter H. Harrison and civic notables applauding the gaunt device as it racketed off captained by a gaunter gripman. He saw and liked Chicago's famous parks. He saw the city's buildings and was depressed.

"Why don't you get some good public dwellings?" he asked.

His hosts explained to him how in restoration after the great fire of 1871 innumerable structures of five and six stories had gone up, "fire-proof," stone and iron, with excessive fire-escapes festooning them. It was these fire-escapes that made the architecture look so bad.

And the sidewalks were horrible, some of them jumping from one level to another.

Wilde made no comment upon Chicago's Art Institute, that out-growth of the Academy of Design which had been founded by Leonard Volk, and which now was housed on the west side of Michigan Avenue.

On the lake front Wilde saw a narrow strip which some people were saying should be named Grant Park, and between it and the water, the railroad running on stilts. And another aesthetic horror on the very forehead of the city's face, an amazing structure, full-blown as Barnum's fat lady, and hideous as an early Kansas railway station. It was something like a circus tent in brick. It was surmounted by several towers or domes with queer "cupolas." "There," Wilde, like other visitors, would be told, "is the Exposition Building. It's wonderful! They hold in it a sort of Crystal Palace affair every year; national

conventions, too. Theodore Thomas has orchestra concerts in it. It covers thousands of square feet. There's an aquarium, lots of steam engines; big ropes of taffy are pulled by machinery. . . .”

They took Oscar onward, down along the lake, which no reporter heard him mention. Had he seen the water in summer, with the view of its placid or stormy loveliness unobstructed by objects like the Exposition Building and Battery D Armory, he could hardly have failed to include it among the beauties of America as he was seeing them. The course lay up Michigan Avenue, and over one of the antiqued, hand-managed draw-bridges across the river, and so to a region little built upon. In the midst of it rose a tall object, a stone tower faintly recalling the Smithsonian Institution which Oscar had seen in Washington. Alongside was a lower building of similar design where there were pumps keeping the water system going.

“Our water-tower, Mr. Wilde. A monument of the Sixties. Thousands of people climb up to see the view. The engines make revolutions of . . .”

Oscar was gazing, speechless.

#### 4

Wilde's hosts took him not at all to the tenements, squalid and crowded beyond belief, nor to the Levee district, a short walk from his hotel, a black hole of vice and police graft and ghastly murders. Part of it had been nicknamed “Cheyenne”; and the Wyoming city had retaliated by calling a certain area “Chicago.” An even shorter walk would have brought Oscar to a string of gambling “hells” which were a continual cause of loud argument between reform elements and Mayor Harrison. While Oscar Wilde was in or near Chicago there developed a heavy anti-gambling crusade on the part of the *Inter Ocean*, published and edited by William Penn Nixon, with William Elery Curtis as his “hell-raising” managing editor. The “I-O,” as everybody called it, burst out with page upon page of gaudy facts, all the addresses of places where roulette, faro, rouge-et-noir, and much else, raged openly, all the names of operators from “Mike” McDonald down, and also all the names of respectable and wealthy citizens who owned these ruinous joints.

More interesting to Wilde was a heavy assault being made upon the “indecent” theater by Dr. Herrick Johnson, head of the Presbyterian Seminary founded by Cyrus McCormick. Dr. Johnson registered no objection to *King Lear* being played in town by Ernesto Rossi, nor to *Mother-in-Law* with Maurice Barrymore; but he roundly condemned

such plays as *Camille* and even *Michael Strogoff*. Of *Odette* he remarked that "when women take part in such a performance the smirch goes deeper than their clothes." And since Sarah Bernhardt sometimes "pandered to immorality," Christians shouldn't patronize the managers who put her on the boards. These observations brought Dr. Johnson into a long continued debate with James H. McVicker—who was one of those very men.

No complaint was heard from Imre Kiralfy, who was in town to stage, once more, the detestable *Black Crook*. It had played any number of seasons in Chicago, defying the moralists, although only a few years had flown by since it was the object of a terrific storm of gossip and had led to the horsewhipping of a noted editor. That editor, Wilbur F. Storey, was approaching his dotage; the scars of forensic conflicts were on him, and his face might still smart in memory of the lashing which Lydia Thompson, star of *The Black Crook*, had given him on the street.

The *Chicago Times*, Storey's paper, had burst out in sentences such as, "Bawds at the Opera House; where are the police?" and, "The other day the *Times* placed the opera troupe on a level with snakes. The *Times* was unintentionally guilty of insulting the latter." He had denounced the expanse of white tights and bare bosoms in Miss Thompson's troupe of blonde chorus girls.

As Storey and his wife had strolled along Michigan Avenue during this furore, Miss Thompson had rushed up with a whip and slashed Storey painfully across the face, crying as she did so, "I have whipped you like a hound—as I wanted to."

The police had come clanging to rush Lydia, her husband, and another actress to jail. Two sensational court hearings followed, at the first of which the defendants were fined two cents each. But at the second, a sterner judge imposed fines totaling two thousand two hundred dollars. Thus, for a long time after, when placards went up announcing a new season of *The Black Crook*, the story was told and retold. If it did not come to the ears of Oscar Wilde as he gossiped with Chicagoans at the Grand Pacific, he missed one of the native legends of the Western metropolis.

## 4

## “A CASTELLATED MONSTROSITY”

CHICAGO enjoyed a thrilling week-end. Oscar Wilde had arrived on Friday, February 10th, and he lingered until the mid-week following.

Long before, fashionable Chicagoans had begun to adopt the aesthetic vogue. *Patience* had made such a vivid impression that “many found bodily refreshment in simply sniffing a rose or a lily. Sunflowers were, for some mysterious reason, the rage, though the high priest of the new cult on one occasion somewhat wilted the popularity of this blossom.

“At a ladies’ luncheon where he was the central figure, when he was asked as to what flower a lady should wear, he sighed, ‘She should wear a lily; she may wear a rose; but never, oh, never, a sunflower.’ A well-known young débutante present, who wore a bunch of sunflowers as a corsage bouquet, hastily smothered and concealed it under her napkin and maneuvered it to the floor at her feet. Such a trouble it had been, too, to procure those sunflowers!”

Among the masses of newspaper readers there was still hostility or amused contempt for aestheticism, as that term was understood, and for almost a month the Chicago editors had fed their patrons such things as:

“Will it make the home of Neighbor Rafferty more endurable if his hencoop is built after the style of the modern renaissance?”

“Will he educate Pat’s wife to choose the correct thing among five-dollar sets of decorated china?”

“Must I hang my five-dollar chromos on the aesthetic line?”

“Mr. Oscar Wilde will be pained to learn that sunflower seeds have become an article of commerce. They are to be sold to be fed in small quantities to poultry for imparting smoothness to their feathers.”

“A rival of Oscar Wilde in London condemns coats, vests, and hats, and attacks trousers with especial ferocity. Come, that would do away with pockets—even the pistol pocket.”

Behind Oscar Wilde’s back, Chicagoans laughed until they cried. Young folks went into the “craze” with vim; even church societies were not above it. The Young Ladies’ Christian Temperance Union of the South Side gave a “Mrs. Partington tea-party,” at which one of those in period costume was a youth made up as Oscar Wilde!

The flutter of this pre-Valentine's-Day week-end, however, was not entirely over the Aesthete. A much greater hero, in the view of the majority, had come to town.

Up from New Orleans a triumphal train carried John L. Sullivan, his managers, his trainers, his masseurs and a princely suite. At Mississippi City, Miss., on the previous Tuesday, John L. had taken nine rounds to ruin the pride of Troy, N. Y., Paddy Ryan. The entire country had been in a frenzy, while in New Orleans excitement had compelled the early closing of the Cotton Exchange. Despite the universal interest, fear of arrest had driven the gladiators out of Louisiana. Finally, on the afternoon of that February 7th, the two men, after betting \$1,000 cash, each on himself, had met in the ring, surrounded by howling supporters, and had gone to it with bare knuckles. Knockdown followed knockdown, and once Sullivan threw Ryan across his hip, smashing him to the ground. At the end of Round Nine the Trojan hero could not rise. Fearfully mauled, he surrendered.

To celebrate this, crowds had turned out at every station during his northward journey to hail John L. as though he were a presidential candidate. So weary did the young champion—he was then twenty-three years old—become of platform appearances that his friends grew ingenious. They sent out “Big Steve,” croupier in Mike McDonald’s Chicago gambling den, “The Store,” to greet the crowds. In imitation of Sullivan, he would remove his derby, thump it on his head, then tilt it on his forearm and spit over it, while he growled, “Much obliged to yees, gentlemen.” The thunderous crowds had cheered the pseudo-Sullivan while inside the car the real one sat calmly smoking.

Almost around the corner from Oscar Wilde’s hotel, in McDonald’s “store,” Sullivan now leaned against the bar. He had shaved off his mustache! He was looking good. He shook all hands. He was haughtier than Oscar himself could be. He was “posing, not before a sunflower or lily,” as a reporter had it, “but before full glasses of an amber liquid.” He had “fists like dumb-bells.” Said John, “It would take a big stake and a good man ever to put me into training again.”

It was soon rumored that Wilde and Sullivan had met in Chicago, but no one in the city saw them together, and the idea was thought to have spread from *Puck*’s burlesque of a supposed Sullivan-Wilde bout, with Whitelaw Reid and many other notables as spectators. The Chicago editorial writers could not overlook this partial conjunction of two great

planets, and both the *Tribune* and the *Inter Ocean* compared, with heavy jest, the art of Wilde and Sullivan.

"Mr. Wilde," said the *Tribune*, "represents a soulful past when solitary knights rode to the fray picking mandolins, but Mr. Sullivan belongs to the rude present and fights in twenty-four-foot tournaments unaccompanied by lutes. . . . Mr. Wilde's school recognizes the ugliest flowers and birds, fills houses with uncouth jugs and bottles, covers wall paper with geometrical impossibilities, covers floors with hideously figured, faded, colorless rugs. It destroys every curve, the lines of beauty, and substitutes an angle or a straight line. It clothes lean, lank women in draperies without a fold or curve, dishevels their hair and suggests uncleanness. It changes the Venus de Milo into a clothes-pole. Whatever is hideous, grotesque, bizarre, unreal, and false it substitutes for the beautiful in aesthetics and from every art eliminates repose, which is the soul of art. As between the two schools it may at least be said for Mr. Sullivan's that it cultivates the muscle and develops a high type of physical manhood, however much we may be disgusted with the method of its use."

And also:

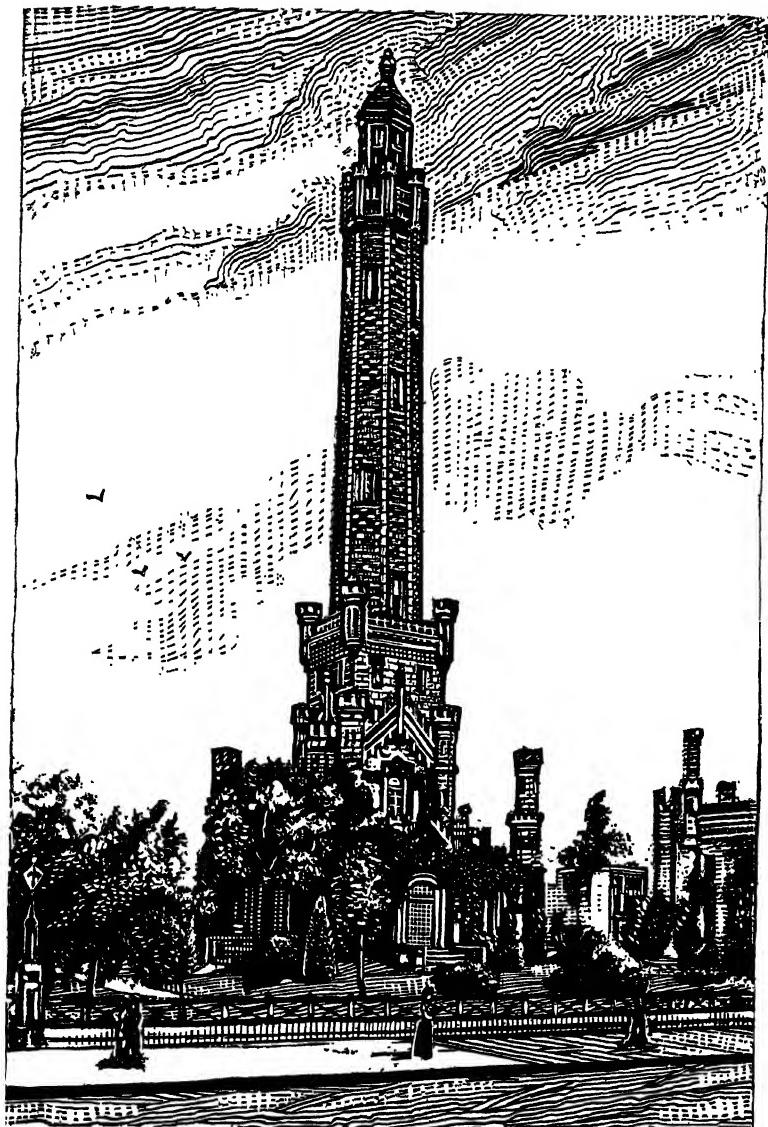
"While Mr. Sullivan calls about him a blackthorn multitude of brawny men, Mr. Wilde can only count upon damosels with clinging gowns."

And, to complete the contrast, reporters persuaded Sullivan to issue a statement praising the Atlantic Ocean!

### 3

If Oscar were not admitted to the august presence of the champion, he could at least enter the homes of Chicago's merchants, meeting the industrial aristocracy—more wives than husbands, but many of the latter as well. There were meals and receptions at the mansions of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin MacVeagh and Mrs. H. O. Stone, and in the names that were murmured to him as the guests filed past were those of Mrs. Leslie Carter, the wealthy matron who had been reading with special interest that Mrs. Langtry had deserted society for the stage; Mrs. John A. Logan, wife of the general-senator from Illinois, and Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Field. The great merchant had lately severed relations with his partner, Levi C. Leiter, and was now, at forty-eight, principal owner of a \$25,000,000-a-year business.

"Mr. Wilde talked very pleasantly and sensibly," said one of the guests at the MacVeagh home, and from others, as they left the house, reporters learned that Wilde had said artificial flowers should never be



**"THE CASTELLATED MONSTROSITY"**

*The Chicago water tower as it appeared during the 1870's and 1880's.  
From a drawing of the period.*

worn, and that only an Oriental beauty could wear a sunflower. Wilde had pleased Chicago society by saying "Americans dance better than the British."

Outside MacVeagh's home small boys waved sunflowers and lilies, and hooted so loudly that Oscar's hosts had to smuggle him out through the stable and down an alley. A few of the urchins, however, detected the ruse and followed, jeering.

After the Stone affair, which came twenty-four hours after his lecture, Wilde was taken to the home of John Root, the brilliant young partner of Daniel H. Burnham in an architectural office which was growing rapidly. As he was in a hurry, a carriage was engaged for Wilde at the well-known Beardsley livery stables. Other drivers being busy, Frank Trudell, the foreman, undertook to pilot the hack. The Root home was not far away, but the night was dark and rainy; and as Trudell's hack splashed along the streets, he had trouble making out the house numbers. Moreover, he showed little compunction about jolting Oscar over rough spots.

Finally the poet put his head out of the carriage window and asked: "I say there, old fellow, what's wrong?"

"Damme if I can find the dod-gasted house," replied the loud-voiced Trudell.

"You ought to know it."

"Yes, but it's so tarnation dark."

A little later, out popped Oscar's head again, with a second protest.

"Look here, you," roared the driver in retort, "if you want me to fiddle around finding numbers, I'll stop and you can hold the horses. They won't stand tied."

"Bless me, I can't do that," from Oscar.

"Then back to town we go," was Trudell's ultimatum.

So Oscar got out, stood in the wet minus even his ulster, and held the horses' heads until Trudell found the house.

While Oscar enjoyed himself inside, the driver waited impatiently. At length he strode up the steps, rang the bell, and demanded: "Say, is Oscar Wilde in there?" Assured that he was, Trudell announced, "Tell him if he wants to ride downtown he'll have to come now!"

Oscar came.

North of the center of Chicago stood that relic, the water tower, symbol of those earlier days when the muddy frontier city had solved its drinking water problem by digging a tunnel far out into the lake, building a pumping system, and thus routing the threat of disease. In 1882

there were still living many who had hailed the new era of sanitation in 1867; many who had stood in a crowd listening to the oratory of those who had laid the water tower's cornerstone and praised W. W. Boyington, the architect, and E. S. Cheshbrough, the engineer. In 1871, Chicago's Great Fire had attacked the tower, but been defeated. Every-body knew it for a landmark, and most people thought it beautiful.

Oscar had noted this object of pride and affection without, evidently, discovering the public's emotion regarding it, and planned to refer to it briefly in his new lecture, “The Decorative Arts,” upon which he labored most of Sunday. Weary of reading “The English Renaissance,” he had decided to discuss house furnishing, civic beauty, and kindred subjects; presenting opinions he had formed since arriving in the United States. He delivered the new lecture from notes, standing on the rostrum of Central Music Hall, that favorite stage for oratory and concerts. Promptly at 8:30, before some 2,500 people who had paid as high as a dollar for seats, he appeared. The sharp-tongued *Times* said they had “paid as they would to see a two-headed Australian ‘what-is-it’” who would talk Greek or Choctaw. The *Inter Ocean*, consistent Republican adversary of the Democratic *Times*, took Oscar's part. “He was a pleasing living water-color in black and white with a crowning cloud of sunset glow in the shape of the much-described old gold (sic) locks.” He had no artifice, said the *Inter Ocean*. “He believes and feels his words and is not deterred by slander and ridicule.”

This last the lecturer soon confirmed. He was pleased to refer good-naturedly to the *Tribune's* editorial about him and “John L.” He said that he “did not wish to reprove the wicked and imaginative editor,” because he knew that “the conscience of an editor is purely decorative.”

Other sentences fell gratefully on Mid-Western ears:

“You would not care for gods, goddesses, or kings. . . .”

“You can make as good a design out of an American turkey as a Japanese out of his native stork.”

“The grandest art of the world has always been the art of republics.”

Half improvising, Wilde told his listeners:

“If life is noble and beautiful, art will be noble and beautiful. The great eras in the history of the arts are not eras of increased artistic feeling, but, primarily, of increased technical feeling—a feeling which must originate with the workman. It is above all the first movement which has brought the handicraftsman and the artist together. To separate them would rob the handicraftsman of all the best art he has ever known. . . . It is impossible to have good workmanship unless the worker can see the beautiful things of Nature about him.

“No machine-made ornaments should be tolerated. They are all bad,

worthless, ugly. People should not mistake the means of civilization for the end. The steam engine and the telephone depend entirely for their value on the use to which they are put."

Then, interpolating one of the localisms which he had found to be popular, he referred to Chicago's Great Fire, saying that the "pouring out of the generous treasures of the world (to help Chicago rise again) was as noble and beautiful as the work of any troops of angels who ever clothed the naked."

#### Applause!

Next he referred to the "vast machinery" of the water-works where the engines revolved, as about the most beautiful thing he had seen in Chicago; "in its vast beats right and left it was simple, grand, and natural."

Then fell from his lips the words which struck straight at Chicago's heart:

"But I was shocked, when I came out of that place, to see the tower—a castellated monstrosity with pepper-boxes stuck all over it."

There were murmurs, but Oscar plunged on:

"I am amazed that any people could so abuse Gothic art, and make a structure look, not like a water-tower, but like the tower of a medieval castle."

Clearly, Wilde intended only to plead for appropriateness in art, for he continued:

"With a little spray of leaves and a little bird in flight the Japanese artist will make one think he has covered the whole surface of a plate, a fan, or a lacquered cabinet simply because he knows exactly where to place each design." He had seen, he said, a young lady painting an elaborate set of moonlight effects and another a sunset scene on china. They might paint sunsets if they liked and moonlight if they dared, but let them not do it on dinner plates. The use to which an object is to be put should be a guide to the subject. Such subjects as these, if beautiful enough, should be handsomely framed and hung on walls. Soup should not be eaten from them.

He directed American artists to look first at the docks of any great city, to watch young men in universities starting on foot races, leaping from a boat, stopping to tie a shoe or playing ball. Watch the reaper with his sickle. He added, "To this country has been given natural marble more varied than any the Greeks ever had, but unless it can be used with beautiful designs and inlays it would be better to build with the red brick of the Puritan fathers."

These sentences fell numbly on the ears of the audience; the insult to the water-tower protruded beyond all. The crowd filed out with head-

shakings. Voices were audible: “Well, what do you think of that?” “The goose!” And one shrill cry: “I didn’t expect to learn anything, and I haven’t!”

Displeasure still rumbled the next day, though Chicago was pleased that it had not sunk to “the ruffianism shown in Eastern cities.” The *Daily News* majestically tried to set the poet right about the water-tower. “He fails to note the degree in which it responds to the fundamental conception of art—economy and fitness.” The editor seemed to have heard that Oscar had asked why the tower had been made as unlike a water-tower as possible. Well, where was there another such tower in the world? Not in Manchester, or Edinburgh, or Vienna. Their reservoirs could not be compared with a device “which virtually elevates the whole of Lake Michigan to the height of the tower.”

And as to American art, the editor declared that it “produces comfortable houses, warm and easy toilets, swift means of travel, equal laws, science, a large liberty, a free course of thought and great rapidity of production in all departments of industry.”

## 5

When reporters came next day with questions about the water-tower, Oscar stood by his guns. “Why build it like a castle where one expects to see knights peering out?”

“And why,” he asked his inquisitors, “why don’t you young men take your newspapers out of the hands of the old fogies and try to revolutionize the world? . . . Your newspapers are comic without being amusing.”

A reporter retorted: “You can’t do much reform on \$25 a week.”

For a time he fenced skillfully with the journalists, then he flamed with a new enthusiasm.

“I have been shown in Chicago,” he said, “examples of art by local artists fit to grace a grand salon in Paris.” It developed at once what he meant. He had discovered a young sculptor named John Donohue. He raved about him. Sarcastically he said to the reporters, “That man can do beautiful work for you—if any of you care for it.” And he exhibited a small bas-relief which Donohue had made to illustrate one of Wilde’s poems. “Look, it’s beautiful.” The newsmen idly looked and dropped the subject, thus missing a dramatic story. For, as Wilde was soon to tell it in Cincinnati, he had received one day at the Grand Pacific the little bas-relief representing a girl seated in pensive posture. It was meant to illustrate Wilde’s poem “Requiescat,” written to commemorate his dead sister. The poet went to Donohue’s studio, a “bare

little room at the top of a great building," as he described it. There he saw a statuette of the young Sophocles, and deemed it "a piece of the highest artistic beauty and perfect workmanship," waiting to be cast in bronze. Oscar learned Donohue's story—how he begged some clay from building workmen and began modeling; how he had gone to Paris on some benefactor's money, and had returned to "starve upon a radish and a crust." Thereafter, at every opportunity, Wilde sang Donohue's praises. It was an expression of his fundamental kindness and real enthusiasm for art—not unlike his efforts to get the poems of Rennell Rodd published, and perhaps no better rewarded.

"Trouble is light," Wilde philosophized, "if one is an artist."

## 6

He gave Chicago kind words as he departed, saying that, after all, there was no "tinsel shabbiness" about it; its women were handsome and well dressed; it was hospitable.

He was sped on his way by friends he had made, but also by a newspaper paragraph:

"Go, Mr. Wilde, and may the sunflower wither at your gaze."

A cab to the station.

"And what will your next lectures be about?"

"Oh," he lightly replied, "they will begin at the doorknob and end with the attic. Beyond that there remains only heaven, which subject I leave to the church."

## 5

### "THE FREE-LUNCH ROUTE"

THE trail ahead looked none too easy.

Oscar of the de luxe hotels, of velvet, silk stockings, and red handkerchiefs, Oscar, the lover of fine dinners and literary *causeries*, was now to venture into the real hinterland. There would be bumpy train-rides, arrivals and departures at awkward hours, hotels with little luxury. In some places warmth would be doubtful, comfortable beds also. And in many hotels there would be a nuisance which shocked into violent utterance that earlier traveler, Marshall—careless spitting. Such things

were even more disgusting to an Oscar Wilde. He laid away in his mind a phrase, “America is one long expectoration.”

## 2

From Chicago he headed for a place of which few Englishmen ever could have heard: Fort Wayne, Indiana. Almost unknown in Europe, it was to Americans a town with a noble history: A seventeenth-century trading post, an English fort and, after the Revolution, the scene of General Anthony Wayne's stockade and his important treaties with the Indians, also those of General William Henry Harrison. In 1882 it had some twenty-seven thousand inhabitants.

Not very many of them went to hear Oscar Wilde, nor was his triumph over them conspicuous. On arrival he was met at the train by a delegation of leading citizens, and when he lectured he was introduced by a Democratic candidate for governor, H. C. Bull. A number of playful youths, aping Boston, appeared in “aesthetic” costume, with lily and sunflower, but made no commotion. Wilde's reading, as judged by the *Fort Wayne News*, was a “languid, monotonous stream of mechanically arranged words.” He “spoke for fully twenty-five minutes before he came to a full stop.” His personality? A figure “unprepossessing as a guide-board.” His lecture? “Scholarly but pointless; as instructive as a tax list to a pauper, and scarcely as interesting.”

Clearly, Fort Wayne was not ready for the aesthetic movement. Oscar moved on to other points more promising—Detroit and Cleveland.

For two weeks ahead of his arrival, the poet had been peppered, in absence, with the witticisms of Detroit's “M. Quad,” humorist of the *Free Press*. Storekeepers were alive to the opportunity; a Woodward Avenue merchant displayed “Wylde tiger lilies, Wylde sunflowers, and Wylde fan leaves,” not accounting for the misspelling. The “Oscar Wilde Galop” in sheet music went on sale along with the new song, “No, sir; no, sir.” Paragraphs appeared echoing his appearances in the East and repeating the inventions of reporters. The Baltimore story that Oscar had charged money to go to receptions had a rebirth with Albany as its setting; this version having it that Wilde's agent had asked fifty dollars on behalf of the poet before he would attend a party in his honor given by a “millionaire noted for his hospitality.”

Thus went the useful though somewhat libelous prelude to Oscar's lecture at the Music Hall the evening of February 17th. He marched upon the stage, and without a bow or more than a glance at the audience, began his discourse on “The Decorative Arts.” Of the few hundred

people present, those who had opera glasses trained them upon his person, and his opening sentences flew over their heads.

AMUSEMENTS.

## HEUCK'S OPERA-HOUSE.

**THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN PATIENCE CO.**

"The Drama is the Meeting Place of Art and Life?"—Oscar Wilde.  
Aestheticism Dramatized and Set to Music.  
Merriment and Music Artistically Conjoined.

"Great in the Beautiful in Art,  
and Oscar Wilde is the Apostle."

**CHAS. E. FORD'S  
COMIC OPERA CO.**

I Earn My Living, Sir.  
On the Contrary, I've Just Had Dinner.

Tell Me, Girl, Do You Ever Tear?  
You are not Hollow, are You?

Will Appear in Cincinnati

**MONDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 27th,**  
In Gilbert and Sullivan's Aesthetic Craze,

P      TWENTY

A

T      LOVE-SICK

20      I

E      MAIDENS.

DASHING N

C      DRAGOONS. E

On the Early English Eve  
It is Too Late.

The Opera will be presented with  
all the original stage business and  
effects with which it is now being  
given at the Standard Theater, N.Y.

As "All I Care About"  
Young Men.

**DON'T FAIL TO ATTEND WEDNESDAY MATINEE.**  
PATIENCE will be given Monday and Tuesday Nights and Wednesday Matinee.  
Wednesday Night—THE MASCOTTE.  
Thursday and Friday Nights—HILLIE TAYLOR.  
Saturday Matinee—THE MASCOTTE.  
Saturday Night—THE MUSKETEERS.

### PIRATES OF THE ROAD

Advertisement in "The Cincinnati Enquirer" for one of the "pirate" companies of "Patience" which was touring the United States in 1882. Even the comic figures which decorate the advertisement were appropriated from programs used by D'Oyly Carte in London.

According to the *Free Press* reporter, the ladies present smiled wearily during the lecture, and as soon as they reached the sidewalk and felt "the bracing, vivifying air of common sense, ripples and bubbles of laughter made a merry music."

Without any particular study of the bustling manufacturing city, which had no art museum, Oscar hurried on to Cleveland, leaving behind the usual aftermath of gossip.

### 3

Cleveland sounded a hospitable note, the day before Wilde's arrival, through the *Herald*, declaring that "Oscar has a right to decent treatment even though he be so utterly, et cetera, that the American mind cannot grasp him, nor the American intellect surround him without danger of suffocation. . . . Remember that Cleveland's politeness is on trial."

It was to "the energy and enterprise of Will J. Cotton" that credit was given for a chance to see Oscar. There was a \$500 guarantee which "made the prospect look misty for a time," but Mr. Cotton "perfected an arrangement."

At the Forest City House Oscar, seated on a sofa decorated exactly like the one in

Chicago with fur robe and old gold colored shawl, drank tea from a blue teapot, smoked, and answered such questions as, “What shall we do to be saved, with reference to art only?” and “How do you like America?”

Concerning cities, he drew distinctions:

“I find New York brilliant and cosmopolitan; Philadelphia, literary; Baltimore, pleasant; Washington, intellectual; Boston, more like Oxford than any city you have. The people in Chicago I find simple and strong, and without any foolish prejudices that have influenced Eastern America. I find the audiences in Chicago very sympathetic, and it gives me a sense of power to sway such large multitudes. It is grand. In fact, the side of your American civilization those of us in Europe who are watching your young republics are most interested in, is not the East but the West. We want to see what civilization you are making for yourselves and by yourselves.”

The *Herald* heard the young visitor say:

“You in America don’t want that we should look upon you as a mere collection of money-making merchants. You would like to influence the civilization of Europe. You are ambitious and should be so; but the only way you can influence us is by producing noble art and a noble civilization. Believe me that we value your American poets much more than your American millionaires; and that we estimate you by the amount of great men you have produced, not by your hoarded wealth.

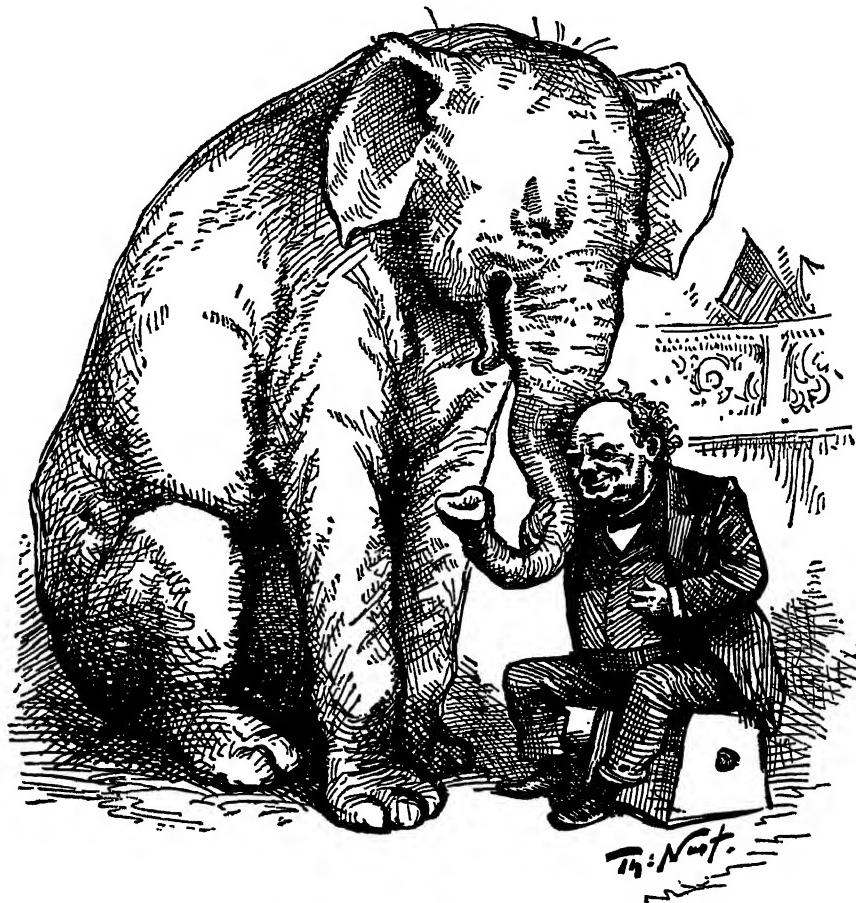
“Can you seriously compare your art with ours? I have just been at Chicago, and while there I saw millions and millions of dollars sunk in public buildings, but I failed to find one single architectural triumph. Your poets are not to be compared with ours.”

Thanks to Mr. Cotton’s efforts, between four hundred and five hundred people were mustered in Case Hall on the evening of February 18th to hear the “Decorative Arts” lecture. It went smoothly and clearly to its close: “We spend our days, each one of us, in looking for the secret of life. Well, the secret of life is in art.”

Oscar was not too tired after his effort to attend the last act of *The Gladiator* at the Opera House, nor to be guest of honor at a “substantial banquet” in the rooms of the Windsor Club. Until 3:30 in the morning the company sat up, telling stories and exchanging jests. And then, after almost a night of it, Oscar had the energy to map out an entirely new lecture, one on “Interior and Exterior Decoration of Houses.”

On the night train Oscar Wilde and Vale journeyed southwestward toward Cincinnati.

The barn-storming tour had become more and more fatiguing. Not everywhere were there "palace cars." Often there were bad train con-



#### MUTUAL ADMIRATION

*"Barnum to Jumbo: You are a humbug after my own heart. You have even beat me in advertising."* Thomas Nast's cartoon of P. T. Barnum and Jumbo in "Harper's Weekly," April 15, 1882.

nections involving waits among the bleak, stove-heated, ill-smelling stations.

It was Vale who saw to the tickets, rounded up the trunks, made arrangements at hotels, and reminded Oscar when he had to descend from the train to visit lunch-counters. They made the acquaintance of the rubber ham sandwich, the deadly though sugared doughnuts

clustered under glass, and worst of all, the invariable pie. English travelers were always warning each other against this last, with its slab of cheese. One of them wrote in bitter vein of the “flat apple or pumpkin pie, worked down by ice-water, and”—most horrifying to a Briton—“followed by cups of hot tea.”

The wearisome laps covered by train were relieved, or else made worse, by train “butchers” even more avid than the ones in the East. Some sold a “great natural curiosity—ivory that grows on trees.” There was also a thing called “Spanish kisses,” one cent per box, described by one who sampled it as “a poisonous compound of some kind of hard-bake.”

The magazines were mostly those that the travelers had seen in the East—but they included the brisk *Saturday Review*, of Indianapolis, where Oscar would soon arrive. And, irritating enough, the Seaside Library, reprinting Wilde’s own writings: his poems and also a sketchy text of his “English Renaissance” lecture.

And always the newspapers . . . sometimes puzzling, sometimes amusing. . . .

Items: Theaters are subject to a reform wave; saloons are being made to close Sundays; “Chicago has got the better of the gamblers,” “Mrs. Prunk’s recitations at Robert’s Park Church last week were the pronounced success of the evening. Her ‘Rock of Ages’ with organ accompaniment elicited an encore. She gave them ‘Kissin’s No Sin,’ and left them in a merry mood.” . . . “At a recent german the ice-cream served was frozen in the shape of horseshoes, with nails of different colors.”

The *Cincinnati Commercial*, on February 17th, was describing a great religious revival in St. Paul’s church, crowds singing, fainting, confessing—everybody deeply impressed by the evangelist’s story of a young convert known as “Henry L.”

Henry L. had explained to his doctor that his run-down condition was due to worry: “For nine weeks all day when at business or study, and in my dreams, one question has sounded through the depths of my soul. ‘Where shall I spend eternity?’

“Oh, doctor, where shall I spend eternity?”

And the evangelist, telling the tale, had said, “The physician was a Baptist and they kneeled together, and before ten o’clock Henry L. and Jesus met, and he settled where he would spend eternity, and had no more use for a physician.”

And a scientific note from New York: “Professor Charles A. Doremus, famous lecturer on science, has analyzed the milk of Hebe, mother



### WHAT A TRIFLE MAY EMBROIL NATIONS!

*“British Lion to American Eagle: ‘In the name of Queen Victoria, the Royal Family, and over a million of children, I demand his release.’”*  
Thomas Nast’s cartoon of the international furore occasioned by Barnum’s purchase of Jumbo from the London zoo. “*Harper’s Weekly*,”  
June 3, 1882.

of the famous baby elephant with Barnum's show. . . . Barnum has inaugurated the breeding of elephants in captivity.”

And more about another elephant—and still more till it became an avalanche powerful enough to crowd Wilde himself further and further back in midland newspapers.

Barnum had bought “Jumbo,” a large elephant from the Royal Zoological Society in London. The Zoo was glad to receive Barnum's \$10,000, but might have changed its mind had it known what the consummation of the sale would mean. Immediately the thing was announced, up rose the little children of England begging Barnum not to take away their elephant friend. Thousands of children wrote from their hearts, other thousands indifferently wrote the letters their parents dictated. Many Englishmen were angry that new-rich, upstart America should be raiding the treasures of the “mother country.” The Queen of England asked Barnum to call off the deal, and so did the Prince of Wales. Even Ruskin, the lover of the beautiful, joined in the protest.

An international incident was about to develop.

Americans defended Barnum when the English began a woeful prophecy that Americans wouldn't know how to feed Jumbo. Americans said they could feed an elephant as intelligently as could the British.

Meanwhile the excited Britishers, crowding two thousand, three thousand, even four thousand a day to the Zoo, pushed so many sympathetic buns upon poor Jumbo that his stomach was nearly ruined.

London, laughing at America for its “Oscar Wilde craze,” had a stupendous Jumbo-ism of its own, a mania producing Jumbo-bracelets, Jumbo-bangles, Jumbo-beefsteaks, Jumbo-cigars, Jumbo-earrings, Jumbo-soups, Jumbo-kisses, and, according to word sent to New York, “a London woman named her baby ‘Jumbo.’ ”

But cool heads in London's chancery court decided, when the matter came up for legal settlement, that the Zoological Society had a right to sell.

## 5

As Wilde went from city to city so much was printed about the luncheons and dinners given him that the press of the nation expanded a quip of the *Chicago Times'* into: “Oscar is establishing a free-lunch route across the country.”

And as Wilde journeyed toward the Ohio River, the newspapers were repeating an item, originating in Boston: “Oscar has been much lionized, but has disgusted his entertainers by abusing the food set before him and going to sleep and snoring in company. A college pro-

fessor has remarked, 'He must have been a Saxon swineherd before the Norman conquest.'"

Cincinnati, as the center of eighteen railroads, was to be Wilde's point of change before proceeding to Louisville, where his next appearance was to be made, and in the Ohio River metropolis were many artistic folk avid to have the Aesthete appreciate its culture. They were proud that experts studying the U. S. Census statistics, two years before, had written: "In Cincinnati, the great city of Ohio, libraries, learned societies, historical, horticultural and literary, thrive as in no other city of the West." The town had had an Academy of Fine Arts since 1838; an art museum was to be replaced by a new one in beautiful Eden Park, the backers being women's organizations and the philanthropist, Charles F. West. Still further, there was the Rookwood Pottery. That enterprise had developed gradually from the ambition of Cincinnati women to exhibit decorated china in the centennial at Philadelphia in 1876. A group of them carried on through the years, and in 1879 two, Miss M. Louise McLaughlin and Mrs. Maria Longworth Nichols, had financed a couple of kilns which had grown into something that an aesthete simply must see.

In a heavy rainstorm he appeared, all but dripping, at the Burnet House, an old and famous hotel, remodeled in the Seventies with a striking dome. Earlier, it had sheltered Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Horace Greeley, Jenny Lind, celebrities untold. For a man with long hair, patent-leather shoes, and a green overcoat to walk into that high-ceilinged lobby was like a sudden invasion by melodrama. For a few minutes men quit arguing about the prices of cotton and hogs, and stopped marveling at the news that Maud S., the mare with a record of 2:10 $\frac{1}{4}$  for the mile, had been "sold East" to William H. Vanderbilt.

People stared and laughed at the weird visitor from London. "Why, it's alive!" a theatrical man joked. Oscar hurried to his room, leaving the lobby full of queries, "Have you seen him?" "What do you think of him?"

Oscar shut himself in. He was not feeling very well. Would the bellboy bring up some flowers? This was referred to the clerk, who told the hotel florist to send up his whole stock of sunflowers.

"They're all sold," came the answer. The shop was loaded, however, with lilies and roses. "Send up three dollars' worth," was the order.

Surrounded by the blooms, Oscar revived, and consented to be shown a few sights by a reporter for the *Gazette*—oldest newspaper in the

Northwest. The poet put on a “stiff brown hat, twice the height of the latest fashionable pancake,” and off he went with the reporter.

Driving around in the incessant downpour, they looked at the Tyler-Davidson Fountain in the city’s heart; “the grandest fountain in the United States,” Cincinnati people insisted. They stepped into a bookstore, where Oscar replenished his supply of novels by Howells and James. They arrived at the Academy of Design. It looked pretty dark and dismal, but Oscar followed his guide through it, twirling his ivory cane.

A “no smoking” sign confronted him. Oscar, who had met this prohibition, in place after place, broke out:

“Great heaven, they speak of smoking as if it were a crime! I wonder they don’t caution the students not to murder each other on the landings.”

He was not pleased with downtown Cincinnati, whose streets were muddy, whose pedestrians were apt to be uncouth, and whose buildings had little charm.

“I wonder,” he blurted, “that criminals do not plead the ugliness of your city as an excuse for their crimes.”

Cincinnati, being far older than Chicago, was less sensitive than the City-of-the-Water-Tower, and let Wilde’s criticism pass.

The *Gazette* man lectured to the lecturer concerning the city, how it had been chartered ever since 1819, and had received swarms of Germans in the turbulent Forties. They were good solid people, devoted to their sängerfests and beer gardens. Thousands of them lived “over the Rhine,” that is, across a canal where leisurely canal-boats plied. It was a pleasant spectacle to see whole families enjoying an hour with the great Gambrinus. The *Gazette* man could say, as did guide-book literature, “The man may drink two glasses of beer to one by the Frau, but even this is rare; the Frau generally gets as many glasses as her liege lord, while the children have their kleines.”

Wilde did not care much for the municipal buildings in City Park, but the university was imposing in its way. The new postoffice! It was celebrated in lines attributed to John McLean in the *Enquirer*:

The lofty towers of ancient Greece  
And Egypt’s famous pyramids,  
The gorgeous palaces of Rome  
Of Babylon and Sidon,  
Put me in mind, in our own day,  
Of Cincinnati’s great display  
Of palaces in grand array,  
Fountains, spires and crescents. . . .

Continuing, the ode recited the wonders of Music Hall, warehouses, the great terrace in Fountain Square, and wound up the eulogy of Cincinnati:

Par excellence above the rest  
She is styled queen of the West  
And if magnificence would attest  
She should have been an empress.

On the strength of these lines Mr. McLean was hailed, seriously or not, as "superior to Whitman."

Though the city seemed drab in the rain, Oscar's travel-weariness left him as a reporter took him, in a hack, driving through the suburbs. They halted for half an hour at the home of Mrs. Nichols on Grandin Road and talked with the artistic lady about her collection and her interest in the pottery.

Some days later it was surmised by a few readers that the Nichols home had been the scene of a Wilde epigram, much-quoted in the nation's newspapers. The story was that he had noted a lady dusting some vases which were too delicate to be intrusted to a maid, and that he had halted her with the words, "Oh, dust should never be removed; it is the bloom of time."

Cincinnati people were sure the thing hadn't happened in Mrs. Nichols's immaculate mansion.

Wilde was driven to the Rookwood Pottery where, as he told an *Enquirer* reporter that same afternoon, "Some of what I saw was very good, some indifferent. But it shows what a person can do—such as Mrs. Nichols." He said that a young artist, working there, a Mr. Bauer, had "real poetic art and fervor."

The *Enquirer* man, catching Wilde soon after his return from the drive, said, "I am going to tell you something that will shock you. Several years ago one of our most promising young artists was employed by a number of our merchants to make a series of pictures for the Vienna Exposition. His pictures attracted great attention and received a medal. What do you think was their theme? Hog killing!"

But Wilde failed to be shocked. He said he didn't know why hog killing shouldn't be artistically treated, and proceeded to instruct the reporter in art:

"All through Holland you will see pictures of brawls in drinking rooms. Yet every once in a while you will see in one of them a gleam of light streaming through a window and tinting the glasses on the table with all the glories of the prisms. Another will display a bit of coloring as warm and as sweet as the kiss of love. The man who painted

these pictures poetized the subjects until the ordinariness of their characters is forgotten. This shows that they were earnest and sincere, and that their heart was in the work. I have little faith in a young man who chooses what are called heroic subjects for his early efforts. It looks as though he were depending on his subject and not on his own power for success.

“The lowliest subject treated with loving earnestness and sincerity will, if the artist is competent, give the best results, just as the plainest words are the most effective in the mouth of an actor.”

The reporter recorded the private lecture conscientiously, but left disappointed in his failure to unhorse the Aesthete.

In the evening, Wilde attended an opera concert at Music Hall, seated in the directors' box and stared at by hundreds of eyes. His “court dress” was in evidence. It was good advance publicity.

So were some of the “ads” put out by enterprising businessmen, as:

#### GENTS!

Have you seen the Oscar Wilde shoes?

(They are too utterly too-too.)

At B. Frank Hart's, 81 W. 4th St.

And:

#### OSCAR WILDE

Says the Opera Puffs Cigarettes are a  
luxurious luxury and just too-too.  
Patti will suffer no more with her  
throat. She will smoke only  
Opera Puffs Cigarettes.

## 6

### “ICE CREAM WITH THE GOVERNOR OF INDIANA”

WHILE Oscar Wilde was sightseeing around Cincinnati, his agent, Vale, was rushing to and from the railroad station perspiring, toiling, worrying.

The newspapers were predicting “the greatest Ohio River flood since 1832!” Waterfront experts were shouting, “The Ohio is rising two

inches an hour"; mills and distilleries and houses near the banks were being vacated. Bottom lands were hidden by the boiling flood. Some coal- and freight-yards were submerged; one passenger station was out of business. Out in mid-current, trees, board fences, rails, rushed past the city. "Rat Row," an underworld section, was swamped, its occupants scurrying to higher ground.

Vale read that in Louisville, where his charge was next due, twelve hundred families had been driven to upper stories, and railroad connections broken. And in St. Louis, which was also on the lecture route, there was trouble equally as grave, for the Mississippi was out of its banks—and levees further south were breaking.

But with the help of railroad men, working day and night to keep traffic open, Vale brought Wilde through to Louisville on the 21st in time for the lecture at Masonic Temple. Where other travelers—and other lecturers—might well have avoided the turbulent, if not dangerous, trip, the Lily-Man came vigorously through, and appeared unruffled before what Louisville felt to be a cultured audience. It was said, over town, that the crowd would have been larger if a blunder, or a hoax, had not been committed in the *Courier-Journal* the day before Wilde's arrival. A notice had been inserted inviting all citizens who wished to entertain the poet to leave their invitations "at Fould's." This had offended the high-toned Southern families, and had kept many away from the lecture.

"Marse Henry" Watterson, however, was not so much shocked but that he could honor Oscar with a favorable editorial in his *Courier-Journal*:

"Oscar Wilde, who lectured last evening at Masonic Temple upon 'The English Renaissance,' is a young gentleman twenty-seven or -eight years of age, who has cut a figure in the world of newspaper and social commentary entirely out of proportion to his performances. He is the son of an Irish surgeon of eminence and a lady who has done some confessedly good literary work. His Oxford career was distinguished. His volume of poems . . . is full of fine flashes and promises. His discourse is abounding in the fitful force and shine which mark his poems. He is, in a word, a young Englishman of respectable family, of showy, if not great, talents, and excellent scholarship, who has come to America to travel, see the country, and, if he can, pick up a few Yankee dollars to pay his expenses and take him home.

"There is nothing very monstrous or very ridiculous in this, and, although Mr. Wilde might shorten his hair and lengthen his breeches to advantage, the trivial eccentricities of flowing locks and silk stockings can scarcely be said to justify the shower of ridicule which the

wearer has everywhere encountered. This would indeed be discreditable to America, if it did not have its origin in England itself, where this young gentleman has for several years stood as a type for the satirization of the caricaturists and wits of the comic press, notably Messrs. Du Maurier, Burnand and Gilbert, the latter of whom put him upon the stage as Bunthorne in *Patience*. [Henry Watterson had, himself, been recently caricatured as an American political "Bunthorne," by Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly*.] The truth is, Mr. Wilde is entitled to no public recognition except such as he may be entitled to as a lecturer. As for his personal idiosyncrasies, they ought to be left to his own choosing and the favor of those who favor them, seeing that those who do not are not obliged to be annoyed by them."

Whether or not he saw much of Louisville society, the visit brought Oscar one of his most agreeable acquaintances in America.

From the audience which heard him speak the evening of the 21st, there came backstage to see him after his lecture, a lady whom he described as "of middle age, with a sweet, gentle manner and a most musical voice." She was Mrs. Philip Speed, of Louisville, a niece of the poet, John Keats. Her father, George Keats, brother of the author, had come to America in 1818 to improve the family fortunes, his own and John's too, and after some less successful ventures had become wealthy in lumber. Ever an admirer of his brother's poems, he himself had given up any literary aspirations he might have had and had battled his way up in a raw country, becoming a leading resident of Louisville.

So it was Emma Keats Speed who introduced herself to the much lionized Oscar, and told him she had at home some manuscripts of her uncle's renowned writings.

"I spent most of the next day with her," Wilde recorded, "reading the letters of Keats to her father, some of which were at that time unpublished, poring over torn yellow leaves and faded scraps of paper."

This had an equally pleasant sequel when Mrs. Speed sent to Wilde, a few weeks later, the original manuscript of Keats's sonnet beginning:

Blue! This the life of heaven—the domain  
Of Cynthia—the wide palace of the sun—

Indianapolis was next—a city free from the rampages of the great rivers, but, like the whole State of Indiana, whose capital it was, agitated by a certain turmoil of the mind and spirit. Eleven years before, one of its natives, Edward Eggleston, preacher, Bible-salesman

and religious-journalist, had written a novel, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, which had depicted the natives as ridiculous illiterates, back-woods barbarians of comic cut.

With the volume selling tremendously over the nation, Indiana had writhed. Citizens of the northern half of the State, and of the old and



"AESTHETIC POLITICS"

Thomas Nast's cartoon of Senator Daniel Vorhees of Indiana and editor Henry Watterson of Louisville as Bunthorne and Grosvenor of "Patience," unable to agree on which is the most beautiful prospect for the Democratic Party, free trade or protection. "Harper's Weekly," December 10, 1881.

cultured settlements along the Wabash and the Ohio rivers, had denounced the book as a calumny and had set out to prove Eggleston a liar. Under this pressure Indiana had begun outspending, proportionately, all States in support of public schools, and now, in 1882, its classrooms were said by many educational authorities to be the best in the nation. Schoolteachers, as if in a crusade, had carried to greater lengths than in all neighboring States the institution of the “Teachers’ Institute,” a periodical assemblage where the pedagogues gave and listened to talks for professional improvement.

In many sections of the State, “Literaries”—neighborhood meetings for the reading of original papers, poems, and tales—had been long popular, and together with the teachers’ institutes, and the general interest in the printed word, were firing extraordinary numbers of young people with an ambition to write and to teach. Indiana University, at Bloomington, was becoming so proficient in its educational courses that it would soon be known as “The Mother of College Presidents.”

The State had, already, produced an author, Lew Wallace, whose *Ben Hur, a Tale of the Christ* had swept the country to the tune of over 300,000 copies, also sweeping him into the post of Minister to Turkey, where he could forget his misfortunes in the Civil War. He had as a Federal general marched his army up and down all day within five miles of the colossal battle of Shiloh without being able to find it.

The young Hoosier, James Whitcomb Riley, who was supplanting Wallace as the State’s literary hero, did not meet Wilde in Indianapolis, having gone East to lecture as the London poet had come West.

In the capital city, however, was a highly literate and humorous weekly, *The Saturday Review*, which had done more to drum up interest in Oscar Wilde than Riley and Wallace together could have done. The editor of the weekly, Charles Dennis, had begun to have fun with his readers by asserting that certain aesthetes of the city—he named staid and prominent citizens—had started a movement to bring Oscar Wilde to town “to counteract the barbaric influence of pork and railroads”—packing plants and railways being the industrial boasts of the city.

Straightway Indianapolis had begun to devil the horrified bigwigs whom Dennis had lampooned, and had also begun a series of “Bunthorne Fancy Dress Parties,” in honor of Oscar’s approach. Emma Abbott, the musical comedienne, had visited Indianapolis in January with her opera company in *Patience*, and, like many companies which competed with D’Oyly Carte’s original production, was barnstorming through the Middle West with rich results. Indianapolis was still sing-

ing *Patience's* songs when, in February, the news came that Oscar was definitely booked for their city.

Immediately the dignified burghers whom Dennis had named as Oscar's sponsors, came running to the office of *The Saturday Review*, begging him, for God's sake, to take their names from the rolls of Indianapolis aesthetes. Solemnly Dennis reported their plea—and their cold feet.

Friendly toward poets, eager to be called "cultured," yet fearful of making a fool of itself over what might be nothing but a Bunthorne clown, Indianapolis was at a pitch of excitement on Washington's Birthday when Wilde arrived. The *Indianapolis News*, which owed much of its high journalistic reputation to its city editor, Harry S. New, greeted Wilde with an editorial written by Morris Ross:

"People have called the young man a fool. He isn't. He knows uncannily well what he is doing. He is not an apostle of anything. He simply escapes from obscurity by an old and common trick. Mr. Wilde gets himself a hearing by adopting knee breeches and a lily. . . . They who go to make a disturbance are ruffians and should be summarily sent to the station house."

To further publicize Wilde, the *News* quoted, in another column, the *Springfield Republican's* quip, "Wilde is a secondhand fool. He has written some concupiscent verse which he will be ashamed of when he gets older." Book stores forthwith were stampeded by buyers clamoring for *Charmides*.

### 3

English's Opera House, owned by the William English who had lately been the Democratic candidate for Vice-President, was flashing loud posters which declared Wilde's lecture on "The English Renaissance" would be "The Fashionable Event of the Season." The posters had need to be loud, for brass bands were about the city celebrating conventions of the State Grand Army of the Republic, the Veterans of the Mexican War, and the Greenbackers. The ex-soldiers made more noise, but the politicians were more numerous, since they were, in 1882, attempting to recapture the strength which they had shown in their great national convention in this same Indianapolis six years before, when, organizing an independent party, they had frightened the two old parties, as well as the vested interests, with their assaults upon industrialism and Eastern finance.

Their clamor for paper money—greenbacks—with which to relieve the debtor victims of the 1873-panic—was particularly vehement in

Indianapolis, for James Buchanan, the lawyer who had been called "the political Moses of the New Party," lived in the city and edited the *Sun*, the weekly which championed the farmers' cause.

Few of the old soldiers or politico-agrarians bothered about Oscar Wilde. It was the citizens with literary inclinations, for the most part, who heard Wilde speak, not on the Renaissance but on "Decorative Art."

The lecture went none too well. The audience numbered about five hundred. Trained on political oratory—some of it excellent—Hoosiers agreed with three Indianapolis newspapers, the *News*, the *Journal*, and the *Sentinel*, that Oscar's delivery was "monotonous." Charlie Dennis's *Saturday Review* caught Wilde using "handicraftsmen" seventeen times, and specified other barbarisms, "teel-e-phone," "eye-solate," "vawse" and "ohs" and "ahs" which "spread over pancakes like syrup."

That Oscar wore no flowers disappointed many. Charlie Dennis disliked Oscar's legs—"They actually had no more symmetry than the same length of garden hose."

## 4

Weary from his strenuous traveling, Wilde was asleep in the New Denison Hotel when, at 11 p.m., Vale, flanked by a messenger from Governor Porter, knocked at the door. The governor was staging a party for assorted Greenbackers and G.A.R. veterans, and around ten o'clock had found his guests growing dull. Billy Roberts, the governor's clerk, had suggested bringing Oscar Wilde over to brighten things up. "The very thing," exclaimed the executive, and Roberts had flown.

"Come in," Oscar had called as Vale pounded the door. There was a rustle of bed-clothes, and Oscar sat up as cheerily as if it were morning. Before Roberts could state his mission, Wilde had treated him to Spanish wine from a goatskin which was handy.

*The Saturday Review* understood that after Roberts had issued the invitation, Wilde asked, "How far does the governor-general live from here?"

"About ten squares."

"Ten squares; and is that a league?"

No, it was about a mile; they would take a hack. Graciously Oscar clambered back into his lecture costume, and on the way to the governor's mansion, talked affably with Roberts. When the latter asked him why he had *really* come to America, he said, "For recreation and pleasure, and I am finding both bounteously. But I have not, as yet,

found any Americans. There are English, French, Danes and Spaniards in New York; but I have yet to see an American."

"I notice," he said, a little later, "that the men shake hands a great deal here. Do the ladies shake hands too?" And when assured that they did, he declared, "I think I should like that. I believe I will—aw—familiarize myself with the custom a little tonight."

On the street near the governor's mansion stood a number of men who were pointed out to him as Greenbackers.

"Are they the class you call Grangers?" asked Wilde, and on being told they were, said, "Aw, I must shake hands with some of them and talk to them. They must be quite a study."

It was now, as he alighted from the hack, or at some other moment of his Indianapolis visit, that he spoke of farmers as "the peasants of this young and undeveloped country," and set the newspapers printing and reprinting the damning news that he had used the opprobrious term of "peasant" upon the American agriculturist, who not only regarded himself as the aristocrat of the New World, but who, indeed, still looked down upon tradesmen with contempt. The farmer, reared on the old American credo of the West—namely, that the common man was the noblest work of God—was commencing in 1882 to weaken before the spectacle of financiers and corporation executives acquiring wealth and power, while he daily lost influence, but the romantic memory of times when the agrarians had ruled still haunted him.

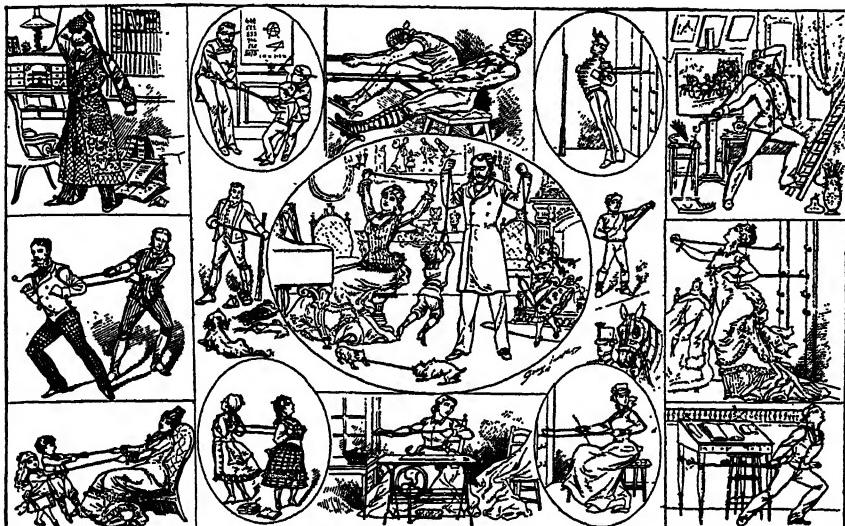
As for the reception, Oscar did brighten it materially. He criticized the architecture of the governor's house, asked if the people had given it to Porter, and when the latter said, No, it was his own choice, Oscar shook his head. Bystanders reported Wilde as thinking it "no better than the Atlantic, if as good."

*The Saturday Review* was told that at supper with the governor and his family, Oscar proved, like the politicians, to be "an animated feeder." He was introduced to ice cream, that American craze, and promptly "placed the small of his back in the seat of his chair and spooned in the ice cream with the languor of a debilitated duck." When he had finished it, "he rose suddenly to his feet, shook hands with great solemnity, and strode sorrowfully away." Dennis observed, "Perhaps ice cream disagrees with him."

In the morning he was gone, hurrying to Cincinnati for a matinee, with the *Indianapolis Sentinel* saying in his wake, "We take pride in the politeness with which Indianapolis received Oscar Wilde after the

boorish displays in the East. . . . Mr. Wilde is evidently a close observer . . . a keen critic . . . with vocabulary of pure English . . . a soft, pleasant voice. . . . Those who expected a fool were disappointed."

Manager Robert Miles's Grand Opera House was well filled, as the matinee lecture began, although the *Cincinnati Enquirer* considered the



#### A MARVEL OF THE AGE OF INVENTION

*"Useful Holiday Present! Goodyear's Pocket Gymnasium or Health Pull. The most perfect means of Increasing Vigor through exercise. These life-giving tubes should be in every home in the land!" Advertisement by the Goodyear Rubber Curler Company in the "Daily Graphic," New York, December 20, 1876.*

stage setting unfortunate. "The attempt at too-too-ism was utterly destroyed by Bob Miles's gigantic lap-robe, which was borrowed for the occasion and thrown over the sofa. It gave the room an air of barbaric splendor that was anything but aesthetic."

Many in the audience thought Wilde was obtaining money under false pretenses because he did not wear his knee breeches. More than one reporter observed that Oscar's afternoon coat was like a line from *Patience*—"a cobwebby gray velvet, with a tender bloom like cold gravy."

The *Enquirer*'s man heard a pert beauty in the audience exclaim, "What an ugly, ungainly looking man he is," and another pert beauty reply, "Ain't he?"

Cincinnati's votaries of ceramics were primed to hear what the Aesthete would say of their work. Lady sponsors and teachers in The School of Design were straining forward too. Theodore Tilton, pointed out as Beecher's rival in love and lyceums, was in a box where Nate Salsbury, the theatrical manager, had placed some of the girls from his musical show *The Troubadours*, then in town. Mayor Means was present with an M. Alwyn Maude, of Rugby; the Rookwooders, Mrs. Nichols and Miss McLaughlin, were there; all in the Grand Opera House.

They all listened. In time, between paragraphs on decorative art, they heard Wilde say, "At a certain school of design I saw moonlight and sunset scenes depicted on dinner plates. That is not the thing to do. Canvas or paper should be the materials for that sort of work, not clay objects that would be sent down to the kitchen to be washed by a maid.

"In landscape painting you want to annihilate the surface by producing the impression of distance; in the other you want to glorify the surface only. There should be no perspective on vawses."

Gently he described a vase on which he had seen the moonlit prairie and a rabbit staring at the moon. The ladies giggled. "The Japanese do it better," he went on. "What a rabbit they would have made—not a mere smudge with a couple of ears, but a little, diminutive, wonderful animal."

Up to this point he had been impersonal so far as Cincinnati's pride was concerned. But now he said, "I saw some designs on your vawses done by someone who, I should say, had only five minutes to catch a train. . . . The institution of pottery should not be a refuge for people who cannot draw nor asylum for the artistically afflicted."

Yet, before he ambled off the stage, he presented good wishes to the art-lovers and art-producers of Cincinnati. They had begun something interesting, and he thought it would succeed. "I cannot express the delight it gives me that I stopped in your city and saw the love you have for the beautiful art of decoration." And finally, he spoke as an apostle of world peace:

"Wars and the clashing of arms and the meeting of men in battles must be always, but I think that art, creating a common intellectual atmosphere between all countries, might, if it could not overshadow the world with the silvery wings of peace, at least make men such brothers that they would not go out to slay one another as they do in Europe, for the whim or caprice of some king or minister. [Applause.] Mighty empires there must be as long as personal ambition and the spirit of the age prevail, but art is the only empire that may not yield to the conquest."

While many in the audience, at the finale, rushed to shake Wilde's hand, reporters quizzed other patrons on how they had liked the talk. "Very much," replied a teacher. "N. G." frowned a railroad man. A Kentucky druggist jested, "I'd rather see the hanging in Covington tomorrow." This preference was for the execution of a Negro named Major Hinds, who had killed one H. M. Williams.

Oscar was so completely surrounded by rustling skirts, soft hand-shakings and bobbing breast-flowers that he had literally to tear himself away. But despite this agreeable jostling and his loss of sleep in Indianapolis, he was up fresh and lively next morning for a visit to the most aesthetic of Cincinnati homes, "The Oaks," in suburban Clifton, where lived Henry Probasco, one of the richest of the many men made rich in the old Ohio River civilization.

Since the 1840's Cincinnati had held many painters, grouping themselves around their patron and adviser, Lars Anderson, philanthropist and brother of the famous Robert who had defended Fort Sumter in 1861. And Probasco's art collection was the finest private one in the city, his prize display to Oscar being a huge canvas, "Frederick of Bohemia Receiving News of the Defeat at Prague," a painting typical of the "heroic subjects" which Wilde had so recently denounced.

Oscar saw Probasco's noted collection of thirteenth-century manuscripts, the round tower of the Anglo-Norman house where fifty guests could drink tea in a tight circle, and the rare shrubs dotting a twenty-seven-acre estate. Then Wilde's hosts rushed him away for a second visit to Mrs. Nichols's home, where he met a kinsman of the Irish patriot, Robert Emmet. Back in town Oscar flatly refused to attend Nate Salsbury's *Troubadours* or to wait for Emma Abbott's *Patience*, which had now taken to following him about the theatrical road.

## 6

Cincinnati turned to other things as Wilde departed for St. Louis. The midget, Tom Thumb, was due next week; Archibald Forbes, a week after that. Cincinnati must tune its voice for the great spring festival which Theodore Thomas staged each year in New York, Cincinnati and Chicago, successively. The city's great religious revival was gaining force, if anything, and was already thought by some to be swaying as many converts as had the celebrated one of 1857. Nightly thousands of zealots sang:

Oh, wondrous bliss, oh, joy sublime,  
I've Jesus with me all the time.

The Ohio flood had passed its height. Sometimes, of afternoons, a warm breeze would come up from New Orleans, promising the spring-time.

Through the night Wilde and Vale traveled toward St. Louis. For days the railroads had been forced to transfer their passengers to boats when the Mississippi River was reached, float them twenty-five miles south, then put them on trains again for the rest of the journey into St. Louis. But Wilde's train was pushed through without this painful business, and on Saturday morning it came in sight of the Missouri metropolis and the great river.

Still yellow and raging, jerking at steamship hawsers, shaking docks, and coiling, python-like, around the huge Eads Bridge, the Father of Waters was as great a novelty to most Englishmen as were the Atlantic or Niagara. But the stream which was called "the spinal column of America," drew no comment from the Aesthete other than "no well-behaved river ought to act that way." It was a thing of Nature, and he was interested in Man's derivations from Nature. It was a fact; his mind ran to theories. It was ugly; he was hunting the beautiful. It belittled man, brushing aside his puny restraints; Wilde dreamed of a place where the hand of man could move with grace, freedom, and finality.

Somewhere the lilies were blooming.

He passed the great river.

## 7

### THE BEAUTIFUL STREETS OF ST. LOUIS

IN Parlor 70 of the New Southern Hotel, Oscar Wilde was interviewing a reporter.

He had turned the tables, and instead of answering questions as to why he had come to America and what aestheticism was, he was learning the nature of St. Louis.

"Have you old French families here?"

"Not exactly," answered the newsman. "Some old families came here years ago, set up as cobblers, tailors, and so on, and took land as payment. They couldn't sell it, so they left it to their children. Prices

boomed and those children left the land to their children; and so it went. Some of them talk French, but most of them German. It's useful in trade."

The strain of facetiousness was natural in the reporter, just as it was natural in all the young men who worked on Joseph McCullagh's rip-roaring *Globe-Democrat*. Joe McCullagh's slashing pen had earned him a fearsome reputation during the Civil War and since that time he had trained his employees to write to please Missouri, where politics was merciless and absorbing.

Wilde who, for all his experience with American newsmen, was still unperturbed in their presence, blandly continued his queries:

"But, tell me, is there no school of design or art academy?"

"No, not a thing."

"No art at all?"

"Well, there's the Sketch Club. It meets once a month. Some member assigns a subject, and the next month the boys bring sketches of that subject."

"How Bohemian!"

"Yes, the man who picks the subject has to set up a lunch of beer and sandwiches. . . . Now, as for art, there is also the picture show at the Annual Cattle Fair. And there's the *Hornet*, an illustrated paper."

"But your art museum . . ."

"Oh, yes—The Crow Museum. It was built by a wealthy man whose son wanted to be an artist. Father wouldn't let him. Son died of grief, I guess. So father put up the museum, sort of a memorial."

Oscar mused upon this tragic tale, then asked, "You have beautiful architecture?"

"Certainly," drawled the reporter. "The City Hall, the Grand Tower block, the Lucas Market, and the church at 8th and Washington."

"I shall at least see the church. . . . Er—your boulevards?"

"Grand! There are no such streets as ours in the world. If it should rain tonight you will see them tomorrow at their best."

"I shall await tomorrow with extreme interest," said the poet with irony.

He remembered that soon he was to visit Springfield, capital of Illinois. Was it in the center of the State? "Yes, all capitals are in the center of states. They put 'em there so as to be easy to reach on horseback. Our own capital is that way. And it would be considered a poem but for the boarding houses and the penitentiary."

The questions and answers went on while there came to Parlor 70 a stream of cards, requests for autographs, encouraging reports of the

seat sale for the lecture that evening—and more reporters knocking on the door.

## 2

Since early that same morning, the New Southern, most famous of the St. Louis hotels, had been agog. Long before Wilde had arrived—floods had made the train late—crowds had hung about the marble lobby rushing up to every long-haired man who entered, then turning away with a sigh, "Pshaw! That ain't him," when the fellow wrote something like "Fritz Hoffleute, Omaha" on the hotel register. Women shoppers had kept thrusting their heads in at the door to see if Oscar could be glimpsed.

At 10:30 in the morning the long-awaited hack had driven up to disgorge the Aesthete, Vale, a local theatrical manager named W. M. Traguier, and John, the "liver-colored" valet. Hotel employees rushed the party in at the ladies' entrance and thus avoided the lobby crowd.

But reporters caught a glimpse of an Oscar Wilde who was new as to outer garb. Against the rigors of a Western winter, the lecturer had bought a heavier fur coat and a black slouch hat so wide of brim as to be more Texan than English or Eastern American. Oscar's manner, as he had hurried into the hotel, reminded a *Post-Dispatch* reporter of Hamlet hastening to keep an appointment with the ghost.

Vale's advance preparations, as in Chicago and Cincinnati, had resulted in Wilde's hotel room being aesthetically furnished—a large sofa was covered with a tasseled drape of old gold while a fur robe hung over its back.

Upon it Wilde had seated himself, laughing off the flood-delayed trip, while porters carried in his two large Saratoga trunks of tin. The reporters at first glimpse marked him as "feminine because of his hair," as looking "not so much like a Madonna as like Henry Ward Beecher," as having "almond-eyes and bad teeth," as being "a stout, well-fed, active young Englishman."

First of the journalists to arrive had been one of the young men on Joseph Pulitzer's *Post-Dispatch* who quickly concocted and jotted down notes for a story on how "the aesthetic chief cook" of the hotel had been expecting to cook for Oscar nothing but "a red-bird and white of egg beaten to a froth," but how he had been bowled over when the Aesthete had ordered "tenderloin of beef, lamb chops, three boiled eggs with toast, coffee, claret and juicy onions."

The reporter called attention to the absence of flowers in the room.

"I suppose you think I can't travel without them," said Oscar. "You see that I can and did."

No, he wasn't tired; he'd been reading Howells; had read every one of the books of that "most charming writer," and was delighted with the vast scope of America.

"We in England have no idea of the distances in your country. The impression there seems to be that all of the large cities are located in the suburbs of New York; then come the Rocky Mountains, next the Indians, then San Francisco and the ocean. We do not understand that large cities like Chicago and Cincinnati are located in the heart of the country. . . .

"Why, this is a world! But it looks so barren and rugged in winter. . . ."

The reporter switched Wilde off with "Have you read what the newspapers print about you?"

"Every line; when I come in at night tired, the reading of a good vigorous attack acts like a dish of caviar. I am not injured by canards, but the public is deceived." That was too bad. In England the papers still had "a sort of old-fashioned regard for truth." The American papers scared away noted Englishmen. Look at Ruskin! He wouldn't come to the States, afraid of the reporters. "Ruskin warned me," Oscar said, "'Everything will be said about you. They will spare nothing.'" Undeterred, here Oscar was. And he had found the people of America very different from the newspapers. The people were kind.

Enough of that, too. Take this down:

"Our duty is to admire or worship the beautiful and the good. Everything else is mere failure, mere shadows."

The reporter for the *Republican*, which was more genteel to Oscar during his stay than were the McCullagh and Pulitzer papers, drew him out about authors and books, then asked him how he felt about all the intrusion on his privacy, and caught the quick reply:

"A reporter called on me in Washington and wanted to get details of my private life. I told him I wished that I had one."

Jotting that down, the St. Louis writer went back to his office to publish complimentary things—"Wilde has genius of the abiding type . . . a thorough gentleman, not the 'greenery yallery Grosvenor gallery' young man he has been painted . . . a young gentleman with Sapphic speech and the mane of Absalom . . . much persecuted."

In moments when he could relax Wilde read the chip-on-shoulder newspapers of the Western river metropolis. A local war on city hall

grafters was raging—an uproar about “the macadam ring” which was going to repair the wretched streets the wrong way.

Blaine was to deliver in Washington the nation’s eulogy to the martyred Garfield.

Guiteau, in Washington, had just broken with his attorney brother-in-law, Scoville, and was announcing that henceforth he’d conduct his own defense in his own way. The public, he said, was with him. “I could make \$50,000 next winter lecturing if I could get out of this.” St. Louis did not think he could get out of it. One of its citizens, Bob Humphreys, had been writing to the Government asking if Guiteau’s executioner wouldn’t be good enough to use St. Louis hemp, a special strand of which Bob was preparing. Bob had supplied ropes for local hangings during the past decade and felt entitled to recognition. A St. Louis tailor was urging that a death-cap of his own design be used on Guiteau when the inevitable day should come.

The *Post-Dispatch* was having sport with local notables, describing how silly they would look in Oscar Wilde’s knee breeches. A local woman had fallen off her porch but hadn’t been injured. Some runaway boys had come home. “A nigger stabbing” on the levee had proved fatal. A grocer’s chimney had got afire but had been put out. A Missouri woman had collected 17,000 spools in eight years.

Wilde saw a drawing of himself, in his celebrated costume, staring at him from an advertisement which read:

GENTS AND GENTLEWOMEN  
allow us to present  
The King of the Sunflower and the Lily  
OSCAR WILDE, Esq.  
  
Those of you who may find it impossible  
to see the *real, sweet and delicious*  
*morsel* himself can see a  
most charming, artistic  
and perfectly exquisite  
counterpart of the dear  
creature in the  
large corner  
window of  
  
Yours aesthetically,  
F. W. HUMPHREY & Co.

Then, as he opened that afternoon’s *Post-Dispatch*, there struck his eye a reproduction of the *Washington Post’s* caricature of his face

compared with that of the simian man from Borneo while under it were the words, "According to Darwin, the first aesthete was a monkey. Darwin must shoulder the responsibility for this cut." Reprints from other newspapers over the country insisted that Wilde had paid the *Post* \$50 to insert the cartoon in the first instance. Oscar had read this canard before, and had denied it, but the denials never caught up.



SUNDAY IN ST. LOUIS

*"A Revivalist Preaching on the Levee."* From a sketch by Charles Upham in "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," April 15, 1882.

Without Colonel Morse to smooth the editors, Wilde brooded in St. Louis. The newspapers were carrying things far indeed. The city was wet and muddy. He would strike back.

Meanwhile he would write to Joaquin Miller, who had defended him from all this sort of thing.

He felt better for a visit, later in the afternoon, to the Wayman Crow Art Museum, went so far as to call it one of the best he had seen, but he was still determined to be critical, however good-humoredly so, when night came.

Fifteen hundred people, including many of the socially elect, many of the rough and the young, sat in Mercantile Library Hall that Saturday evening. Attendance, it was thought, was all the greater because so many ladies, crowding into the hotel that afternoon, had not been able to see the Sunflower apostle. It had helped, too, to have the rumor fly over town that bad boys were planning to howl him down, kick up some kind of a fuss—nobody knew just what.

While the audience waited, a young man walked to a front seat wearing a huge calla lily on his lapel. Near the platform sat three women and two girls carrying artificial sunflowers which were being hawked by small, loud boys on the sidewalks outside the hall. The venture was proving unsuccessful, however, as was indicated by the wails and snarls of the urchins, who were finding at lecture time that they had overinvested.

Wilde gliding unaccompanied to the stage, at the appointed hour, barely waited for the applause to subside before he launched into his lecture, speaking, as was his custom, without emphasis—perhaps with more monotony than usual, for he did not like these listeners. He could see their eyes fixed on his short pants, hear them whispering, giggling.

Early in his address he inserted a sarcastic reference to "your beautiful streets." This drew half-hearted applause and some laughter which the tough boys in the back seats expanded into miniature bedlam, stamping and whistling for a time in spite of the scowls and hisses of the rest of the audience. There was shuffling heard and yawning visible while Oscar talked of the aesthetic movement in Germany.

Languidly but pointedly he came to a paragraph, "Make it a law that no newspaper be allowed to write about art at all. The harm that they do is not to be overestimated—not to the artist, but to the public. To disagree on all points with the modern newspaper is one of the chief indications of sanity."

Then he resumed the stock lecture until he began to talk about defacing buildings and even landscapes with ugly, conspicuous advertisements, and about giving workmen beautiful surroundings. "Give them stately buildings," he said, "adopt a bright and simple dress, and have streets clean enough to walk through without being soiled—"

A shout of laughter arose, and the applause was again extended by the sportive boys in the back. Reporters thought that Oscar halted in surprise at the tumult, although it was apparent to others that he had made the hit deliberately. Restlessness kept up while he told how the Oxford boys had built a road for Ruskin—"We did the work, not minding the scoffs then more than we do now." Much of the account was inaudible due to the scuffling of the back-row disturbers.

Oscar quit the platform abruptly as he reached the end of his manuscript and, backstage, declared it the worst treatment he had received in America. It had been "villainous."

However, he had regained his good-nature by the time he had been brought to The Press Club where a reception awaited him. He was smiling now, and complimenting "the superior culture" of those who had been present at the lecture. "The acoustics weren't very good," he explained cheerfully. His mood was improved, too, by the lavish bouquets with which the clubrooms were decorated, and, when asked what he thought of the aesthetic display, he said, "This is not perfect, but it is a step toward the ideal conception of art, and is more beautiful than anything I have seen in this country."

The members and guests, including many businessmen, crowded about, shook Oscar's hand, listened for wit. It was not his most brilliant performance. The club president, perhaps to stir him up, said, "We have gathered a few sunflowers here," pointing to the bearded merchants and others present. Oscar was too much overcome by the *bon mot* to respond to it.

They showed him a painting of midland fame called "The Press Carnival" by an artist named Yankstone, a masterpiece depicting men of note grouped in the foreground. Ingersoll's portrait was there. Oscar said he was "the most intelligent man of the country."

Not especially at home amid the brokers, grain men, merchants, who dominated the gathering, Oscar asked whether they ever read the *London Truth*—Labouchère's paper. "Labouchère is the best writer in Europe—a most remarkable gentleman."

It happened that St. Louis folk were mostly out of sympathy with Labouchère's radical politics.

Nor did it go any better when President Slayback of the Merchants Exchange was introduced and Oscar challenged: "You are ruining our English farmers and making them work for a protection policy against American produce. There is a universal demand for protection against your grain."

The quick-witted Slayback turned the jab aside by saying:

"If you would only come down and buy some wheat you would make more money than by lecturing."

To the Aesthete, as he stood drooping against a table, was presented David Francis, from whom the city was expecting great things in politics, and who, Oscar was told, was a famous "bull" on the stock market, having indeed just caused a stampede in world finance. With a tired smile, Wilde observed that there were bulls in Europe too. He felt better when a member came up to say he knew Wilde's poems

almost by heart; and better yet when a Dr. Thomas O'Reilly declared he had been an amanuensis to Wilde's father. The Aesthetic Quintette Club sang and played instruments, someone recited a Bret Harte poem, and champagne flowed.

After all that, Oscar was still able to move to the Elks Social Club, which made much of him until the hours grew exceedingly small.

## 5

Possibly because he had come to St. Louis at the week's end, when schools were closed, Wilde was said to have missed what would have been, to him, one of the most interesting of American institutions—the nation's first manual training school. In 1880 Calvin Woodward, a teacher of the town, had started this classroom as the result of having seen, at the Centennial Exposition, exhibits of handicrafts taught in the schools of Europe—the same woodcarving by Swiss boys which Oscar Wilde was holding up as a model to America.

But St. Louis had other cultural possessions to show the visitor, and on Sunday some citizens, including Dr. O'Reilly and Colonel J. C. Normile, the lawyer, dined him, then took him to see Henry Shaw's botanical garden, Hercules L. Dousman's art collection, and the studio of Professor Carl Guthertz, best known of the city's painters. And Fire Company Number Fifteen, the town's pride, entertained him with a drill, turning out the horses, clanging their bell heroically, and sliding down the pole—a recent innovation in America. Oscar told them, "I shall sleep soundly tonight," and next day the *Post-Dispatch* declared, "The Fifteens are converts. They will plant sunflowers behind the engine-house in the spring."

To Englishmen Wilde would soon be saying, "America is a country that has no trappings, no pageants and no gorgeous ceremonies. I saw only two processions—one was the Fire Brigade preceded by the Police, the other was the Police preceded by the Fire Brigade."

Sunday passed and Wilde prepared to depart by Monday's 7:30 morning train for Springfield. Neither he nor St. Louis had been at top form during his stay. The next time he would be interviewed Wilde would say, "Several St. Louis citizens told me the city was not at its best. I should have thought so, even though the information was lacking."

As he sat at breakfast in the New Southern before his departure, the head waiter asked him for an autograph, and Wilde wrote three lines from one of his poems:

The rustling bluebells come  
Almost before the cuckoo finds a mate,  
And overstay the swallow.

The *Post-Dispatch* was inventing a story that John, Oscar's Negro valet, "now writes nearly all of Mr. Wilde's autographs, particularly those requested by mail." But, in addition to the head waiter, there was another hotel employee who knew this to be untrue. A Negro bellboy, amid all the hustle and confusion of Wilde's rush for the train, got up courage to ask for a souvenir—a piece of writing, not a tip.

The tall Britisher halted and wrote on a card:

The sea is flecked with bars of gold,  
The dull dead wind is out of tune.

The black lips were proudly spelling it out as the poet went away.

## 6

Wilde's course from St. Louis to its bitter commercial rival, Chicago, lay through that Springfield, Illinois, about which he had made inquiry. In the capital he delivered his already thumb-worn discourse on decorative art, but abbreviated it to forty-five minutes as timed by the *State-Register*. That newspaper thought he had "a melancholy cast of countenance." It was used to bland, ruddy, barrel-shaped legislators. So was the *State Journal*, which called him "an exaggerated boy of two or three years, who has suddenly expanded to the size of a man, small clothes, flowing locks and all. Our art must, indeed, be in its infancy."

Oscar did not tarry in the town where Abraham Lincoln lay buried—or as gossip in the town rightly had it, *not* buried in his sarcophagus. The body was, in reality, hidden in the basement of the monument to keep ghouls from completing the theft which they had, six years before, tried to perpetrate.

As an aristocrat of Great Britain, Wilde was far more interested in Jefferson Davis, the President of the late Confederacy, than in Davis's conqueror, the backwoods genius from Illinois. Nor was Wilde interested in Lincoln's widow who languished now, insane, in her sister's home in Springfield.

He pushed on to Dubuque, Iowa, then to Rock Island, Illinois, and after a trip to Chicago, back west to the neighboring cities of Rockford and Aurora.

It was becoming evident that the lectures in the smaller cities were not profitable. Spectators in Dubuque were so few that Vale went to

the footlights and asked them to "come up forward." To many empty seats and blank faces Oscar read his lecture. When the guarantor of the entertainment, A. Kitson, checked up, it was said he "felt exceedingly limpid" over the result; he had expected the poet to be more of an orator. The same report put Oscar's compensation at \$180.

At Rockford, where he was annoyed by being announced to speak on "The English Renaissance" instead of "The Decorative Arts," and where he was disappointed by the small receipts—reported as only \$135—Oscar heard that "a prominent clergyman" had influenced the head of the Female Seminary to turn back her tickets at the box office. In the community it was suspected, when Preacher T. F. Marsh, Presbyterian, preached the following Sunday upon Oscar's dress, that he had been at the bottom of the boycott. But Wilde, being faced just then with an attack from Professor David Swing, ascribed it all to the latter.

It was one thing to be assailed by Medill's or Storey's editorial writers; quite another to be attacked by the most popular and broad-minded preacher in the midlands. Thousands of people who might have liked Oscar Wilde all the better for a little opposition from conventional, dogmatic clerics, decided that, as a man, he must be a poor stick indeed if so liberal a clergyman as Swing disapproved of him.

Swing's generous love of mankind had been sensationalized dramatized for the nation only eight years before. At his celebrated trial before the Presbytery of Chicago in 1874, the prosecution's case, printed and reprinted widely each day for more than two seething weeks, had made Swing a popular hero with those masses that were already turning from the old-time religion. It was charged that he had taught that good works were more important than faith, that one god was more plausible than three, that John Stuart Mill, the atheist, had some good points, and that ancient Israelites "surpassed Julius Caesar in cruelty."

The prosecutors of Swing proved that he had said such heretical things as:

"Mothers have wailed in awful agony over a dead infant because they had been taught that children 'not a span long' were suffering on the hot floor of hell."

"The pictures of hell first frightened the multitude, then, afterward, destroyed the idea of God. The fagot, the rack and the boiling oil were a resort of potentates, for if God was so glorifying the torment of heretics just Beyond, it was a small matter if the church tormented them slightly on this side of the tomb."

"Chicago being the halting place of businessmen and not of pilgrims, the local gospel was compelled to become a mode of virtue rather

than a jumble of doctrines. The city's multitudes need virtue more than theology."

While the battle raged inside the Presbyterian Church, involving the Old School and the New School factions, a running fire of humor had kept the public attentive, and Swing had made everybody laugh as he concluded his defense with the statement that he had been accused one moment of being a Trinitarian and the next a Unitarian. "Whatever your verdict may be," he said to the judges, "don't make me both. I could bear to be either perhaps, but I could not bear to be both."

Three clergymen, sitting on the case, had freed him so quickly as actually to insult the prosecutor. But Swing had had enough of heresy talk and resigned, only to find Chicagoans so worshipful that they built him a forum, Central Music Hall—the stage Wilde had occupied—and made him "the Beecher of the Windy City." Meanwhile the scorching he had given hell had united with Ingersoll's to make ever-increasing trouble for Presbyterians. As recently as November, 1881, that church had been forced to try a San Francisco Sunday-school teacher, Mrs. Sarah B. Cooper, for having hung Bob Ingersoll's picture on her wall and for having told a protesting deacon, "Ingersoll will yet be reaching over the parapets of heaven to pull you in, and if hell is made up of such men as he, and heaven of such as you, I'll go to hell every time."

It was Swing's reputation as much as his words that made his attack upon Wilde the most serious America had put upon the Aesthete.

"Oscar the Small," was the heading Swing put upon his article in *The Alliance*, his publication designed for religious folk, but read by many others as well. Oscar was "a perfect specimen of man, the little," and "a woman kissing a poodle comes nearer expressing the unmanliness of this peacockism. He is a peddler of childish jimcracks and



REV. DAVID SWING

*The great divine at the time of his famous trial for heresy. The "Daily Graphic," May 5, 1874.*

his domain is not the world, but the showcase of some notion store."

He thought Wilde "the enigma of today . . . an intellectual and emotional abyss . . . a man whose intellectual height and depth are best expressed by the tailor and the laundress. . . . The essential smallness of Mr. Wilde may be learned from his egotism, for a large mind would omit to boast of getting \$1,000 a night while other great men were receiving only \$300.

"Mr. Wilde mars his work by his personal peculiarities. These would not matter did he not make himself an illustration of his art theory. He teaches and then says, 'Look at me,' and thus the 'me' becomes a part of the renaissance. We look, and we confess that the water-tower of Chicago has as much right to its 'pepper boxes' as Oscar has to his shoe-buckles and 'tights.'"

He had heard that Wilde had called for more aesthetic railway stations, and this amused him, as his facile pen scratched across the paper in his study:

"If possible, a cow-shed should appeal to some sense of the beautiful in man, and a railway station should have such an air of comfort and fitness in it that the heart might be made almost willing to wait a half hour for a belated train. In this, Mr. Wilde is truer than John Ruskin, for Mr. Ruskin declared that all ornament placed in or on a railway station was badly located, for the human soul waiting for a train was so forlorn that to offer it the beautiful was like placing a dish of food before a seasick dyspeptic. There being a great many happy people at railway stations—persons waiting for a loved one who is only five miles away, persons down to begin a bridal tour, persons there to see the mother-in-law safely off on her home run—all these welcome a little of the aesthetic, and feel that the railway houses are quite home-like. Inasmuch as Mr. Wilde advocates a universal decoration he surpasses his guide, and this is the only particular in which the disciple is greater than his master."

The professor thought Wilde might be sincere but "we must add that his mind is of small caliber, and makes more use of trifling forms of the beautiful than of any great ideas or works in that field. He is to John Ruskin . . . about what a shoe-buckle is to a statue by Canova, or what a crimson cravat is to a bronze fountain or landscape in soft water colors."

Oscar was good-natured but pointed in reply. He referred his critic back to the Chicago lecture in which "I dwelt on the moral education that working in any art would give a man—the two things on which all good art is founded, truth and honesty. In the world of business it is

THE BEAUTIFUL STREETS OF ST. LOUIS 215  
possible for the liar and cheat to escape detection during all their lives  
—not so in art."

Oscar was "surprised to find anyone with the name of David fighting in the ranks of the Philistines." Swing "ought to take a pebble from the banks of the Chicago River and hurl it at that monstrous Goliath of architecture, the water-tower." He said that he had found that "the sermon of the divine is always humorous, and the writing of the humorist is depressing," while, "as for his sneer at me for receiving a fee for lecturing, I can assure him that he is not the first clergyman who has thus condemned me. But this shaft does not sting when I consider that it comes from a body of men the most of whom preach for a salary."

And finally, in this outspoken Chicago, the young epigrammatist uttered a sentence which might have applied to much of his American experience:

"Next to having a stanch friend is the pleasure of having a brilliant enemy."

In dramatic contrast to the assaults of the West's most forceful preacher was Wilde's meeting in Chicago with the East's most famous divine, Henry Ward Beecher himself. No newspapermen witnessed the conjunction of the two, but soon the item was being printed all over the country, "Beecher has met Wilde in Chicago and invited him to be his guest at Peekskill in June."

7

Vale's remorseless routine swept Wilde swiftly northward to the Wisconsin city of Racine where, on the night of March 4th, he was seen by a *New York Herald* reporter to break down in the midst of a lecture which had been occasionally interrupted by snickers from the seventy persons who constituted the audience. To the reporter Wilde explained that "he was exhausted and could not read his manuscript."

He continued, "I have been to so many incipient little places of late, and I am almost worn out with hunger. I love my cigarettes and do not know what I should have done without them. I have not been able to obtain a morsel of food that I liked, and have lived on cigarettes."

Next day when he arrived in Milwaukee to find that the birthday of the Irish patriot, Robert Emmet, had just been celebrated, he said that if he had known it he would have given up his Racine lecture to attend the exercises. He talked to reporters about the kinsman of Emmet he had met in Cincinnati and added that he was "strongly in sympathy with the Parnell movement" for Irish Home Rule which was nearing the point of bloodshed in Ireland. Eloquent on the subject, now that

it had been brought up, Wilde told how his family had intimately known Thomas Francis Meagher, the New York immigrant who had stirred America with his speeches for Irish freedom, and how friendly it had been with William Smith O'Brien, who, in the 1840's, had gone to prison for stirring the Irish farmers to revolt.

The Irish of Milwaukee were gratified to read of these things, but there were only 300 persons in the Grand Opera House on that evening of Sunday, March 5th, when "Speranza's" son gave his lecture. The *Sentinel* described him as "a great ungainly crane" as he came into a stage-setting of "wonderful and fearfully proportioned dadoes and Eastlakes, and great storks, standing knee-deep in 'yallery greenery, fixed on at Racinery' paint."

Newspaper work was at its imaginative worst in Milwaukee during Oscar's visit. The *Republican* described him as a painter instead of a poet, the *Evening Wisconsin* declared his real name to be O'Flahertie and that he had "adopted his mother's name, Wilde, as being more pleasant to the ear," and the *Sentinel* published a fantastic tale of how, in starting off-stage after his lecture, he had missed the exit, blundered around for some seconds, then getting off, had demanded, "Why didn't you have that door so that it would open, and not compel me to make an ass of myself?" When a stagehand had exclaimed, "Mr. Wilde, we thought it would open," it was reported that "the poor boy was crushed by the denunciatory shout, 'Don't 'Mr. Wilde' me! I'm of noble birth. Treat me as becomes my station—with respect!' He then turned and walked away, shouting, 'Come upstairs! Come up, will you?' Who was meant, no one knew, and accordingly no one responded to the lank Aesthete as he strode off."

Few people who knew Wilde, or his conduct during his tour, believed this story in its full detail, for while he had been undoubtedly less remarkable for good-humor since his St. Louis experience, the brusqueness and claims of noble birth ascribed to him were known to be entirely out of character.

Back in Chicago, where he awaited the beginning of his next expedition, Wilde dripped sayings which newspapers used copiously. Never since arriving in America had it been plainer that he could talk endlessly and brightly on nearly all subjects, no matter how great his physical weariness.

Reporters asked him about St. Louis. He said he had seen its art museum which had "the first quality of a good museum—nothing in it that could possibly lead a young art student astray." They asked him

about painters as represented in American collections, and he said, "Of the modern school of English painters I've seen no examples. John Millais is one of the greatest painters that England has ever produced." They asked him about industry and labor, and were answered, "There's no connection between poverty and radicalism, but there is between handicraft and republicanism. To work at any handicraft induces that sense of independence which is the keynote of all republicanism." They asked him about acting, and he declared, "Henry Irving is our greatest tragedian."

"Made much dust?" a reporter inquired.

"You mean money?" Oscar asked in return. "Considerable. I shall return home several thousand pounds richer than when I left the steamer in New York."

People who read this were reminded of the time when Patti asked \$5,000 of J. H. Haverly for each concert, and how, computing the yearly sum at \$50,000 a month, he had commented "our President works a year for that." "Then get the President to sing for you," the diva snapped.

Of Mrs. Langtry's charms Oscar said, "Her figure is molded like a Greek statue. She is not petite, but I would not say that she is tall. She is of perfect artistic height. When she has studied her art she will be able to act Shakespeare's Rosalind in a way in which most of us have never seen the part done."

He was willing to answer almost any query except sheer nonsense. "Really, my dear boy, you amaze me," he answered the question, "Is it true that tea made from the yellow fringe of sunflowers will cure small-pox?" And to another, "Do you believe in the blue grass theory of curing rheumatism and baldness?" he answered, "I am at a loss to catch your drift. I am in America to lecture on the decorative in art, not to cure rheumatism or restore hirsute appendages."

Here and there Oscar's seeds of aesthetic thought fell upon fertile ground. At the next monthly meeting of the Decorative Art Society of Chicago, which had been in existence for four years, and upon whose program were the wealthy women, Mrs. John N. Jewett, Mrs. J. Young Scammon and Mrs. Wirt Dexter, the subject for discussion was "Dining-room Decoration." And the illustration of good taste was the dining-room of Whistler, as described by Oscar Wilde.

## 8

## A NATION OF ORATORS

IN the intervals between short trips to midland platforms, Oscar rested at Chicago's Grand Pacific Hotel and worked on his new lecture.

This was to be "Interior and Exterior Decoration of Houses" and would, he planned, show America the aesthetic reform in the dressing of the home as he had, by his example and other lectures, explained about the dressing of the human frame.

But Chicagoans, hearing of this new talk, which was due at the Central Music Hall on Saturday, March 11th, felt a sudden lack of interest. Of all American cities theirs was the most absorbed in getting rich, in making itself the business center of the nation's industry.

Also it had been overlectured of late. Henry Ward Beecher, on the 4th of March, had given the city a shock by fainting on the Central Music Hall stage while delivering his version of the aesthetic movement, "The Moral Uses of Luxury and Beauty." John B. Gough, the temperance entertainer, had just delighted a packed house with his anecdotes of drunkards. Furthermore a new spell-binding preacher, the Reverend Poindexter S. Henson, had recently taken over the First Baptist pulpit and had made his congregation guffaw as he talked on "Fools."

Wilde was discovering that, as a public speaker, he was no match for American lecturers. Many Englishmen before him had noted as much, and had admitted that the Americans easily outstripped all other races in oratory. Kingsley, Arnold, Tyndall, Coleridge, and Stanley had all been criticized for bad elocution while lecturing in America. Wilde's declaration that "we [the Irish] are the greatest talkers since the Greeks" was not true, according to most observant Britons—it was the Americans.

Beyond America's dislike of Wilde's English accent was a greater disappointment, one based on an artistic standard far beyond anything the Aesthete could comprehend.

The American public was much better equipped to criticize and appraise the art of the speaker than of the writer, the musician, the painter,

or the sculptor. For two centuries the nation had given and listened to more speeches, it was estimated, than any other country in a similar length of time. In it more orators had spoken to more people than in any two hundred years in the life of Greece or Rome. Free speech had been one of the cardinal principles of the New World Republic, and the people had taken it literally. Faith in the political doctrine that every man was qualified to judge and discuss or even take the stump on all problems of state, finance, or international relations, had kept tongues loose. Town meetings, biannual Congressional elections, quadrennial elections of Presidents, long campaigns, township, county, district, State, national nominating conventions, rallies, mass-meetings, even political caucuses were occasions for endless oratory. Newspapers, from colonial times, had printed the speeches of lawmakers and campaigners.

Oratory had been a fine art in the land ever since Patrick Henry had made Virginia rafters ring with his demand for liberty or death. Always there were debates, oratorical of character, in houses, stables, clearings, as to who had been the greatest speaker in American life: Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, James H. Lane of Kansas, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, Sargent Prentiss of the South, Senator Hayne of South Carolina, Tom Corwin of Ohio, or others, dozens of them.

In 1882 there had been in Oscar Wilde's audiences men and women who had, as children, traveled with their parents in wagons about the country, holidaying after the gifted speakers who, by the score, stumped for Harrison or Van Buren in the hard-cider campaign of 1840. They had, when adult, listened to the entralling voices of Beecher, of Blaine, of Garfield, of Ingersoll, of Stewart L. Woodford, of Proctor Knott, of John A. Logan, and of Roscoe Conkling, who had by the magic of his oratory almost won the third nomination—a national taboo—of Grant for the Presidency.

In Chicago, in Milwaukee, in Springfield, in St. Louis, Wilde had been listened to by many who had heard the thin, subtle voice of Abraham Lincoln swaying minds to him in courtrooms and political meetings. Some of Wilde's patrons at Central Music Hall had heard Mark Twain, at 3:30 A.M. on the night of November 13, 1879, charm and woo six hundred speech-drunk listeners into screams and whoops of stentorian laughter at the Grand Pacific Hotel. It was already a great tradition in the town how at the old soldiers' banquet to Grant on that evening, the nation's best orators, one after another, had poured out their sweetest music, till Ingersoll had, around 2 A.M., mounted on the table among the champagne glasses, to seduce them with what Mark Twain, nervously awaiting his turn, would describe as "the supremest

combination of English words ever put together since the world began." Then Mark's own time had come, with the audience satiated, intoxicated with what had been, to them, almost too beautiful to realize. He had arisen and with tortuous slowness, with uncanny mastery of pause and lingering syllables, had intrigued them, tickled them, teased them, with his rambling humor on the theme—babies. And at the end when he had looked down at Grant and had said that this most resolute of all the world's captains had, as a baby, set out to put his big toe in his mouth—and of course succeeded, people had forgotten their physical weariness, and had rolled and wept and cried aloud in the agony of excruciating laughter.

The fine points of speakers, their voices, their gestures, their authority, their technique, were things farmers, laborers, housewives, merchants, discussed. Clergymen, too, were rated more often on their eloquence than on their saintliness, powers of church organization, or theology. From pioneer times, circuit-riding preachers had been correspondingly successful as they were artful storytellers, humorists, or dramatists in the pulpit. They and the lawyers had served well in the absence of the theater in the log-cabin period, and the tradition of the courts was that the spellbinder won the juries. And even after the professional drama, with its traveling actors, had come to communities, it was upon the elocution of the players that most public attention was centered. Crowds leaving theaters argued about the voices of Booth, McCullough, Barrett, Forrest far more than about their interpretations of rôles.

## 3

McGuffey's Readers, long the standard text of the public schools, had been written to train the voice more than the mind. The Fifth Reader had contained instructions, not on the lessons to be learned from the printed selections of literary masterpieces, not on the meaning of the authors, but how best to read aloud.

How to recite with poetical grace, to declaim with sonorous and measured flow, was the Reader's purpose, and its pages, endlessly, remorselessly, pounded into the pupil the importance of accent, emphasis, inflection, poetic pause, strength and compass of the voice, rotundity of voice, gestures of propriety and grace. "Rhetorical notation," an elaborate system of text-markings, indicated the rising inflection, the falling inflection, the rising and falling circumflexes, the emphatic pause, the cesura, the demicesura, the low tone, the still lower tone. Armies of Wilde's listeners sat comparing his monotonous British diction with what they had learned while repeating McGuffey's selections on the

prospects of the Cherokees, the madness of Mary, the Maid of the Inn, or how the water came down from Lodore.

This school training, added to the democratic system of political oratory, had given the American public such an eagerness for being lectured to that a most active business had been created for the supply



#### WHERE WILDE'S WESTERN TOUR BEGAN

*Academy of Music, Sioux City, Iowa. The "Daily Graphic," May 19, 1882.*

of oratorical entertainers. The vast supply of free speeches could not meet the demand. Lyceums had arisen.

The lyceum was the organization of groups large and small, who underwrote a course of from six to eight lectures to be given in the local church, opera house, or Masonic Hall. The routine was to contract with a New York or Boston lecture bureau for talent, and to hope that enough tickets for the "course" could be sold to pay expenses or, possibly, to make a profit.

James Redpath's bureau had been, since the Civil War, the most

popular of these booking agencies, although Major J. B. Pond's was now, in 1882, pressing him hard. Both Redpath and Pond, like the majority of their higher-priced lecturers, had come to the platform business from either the anti-slavery agitation or propaganda work during the war.

Mark Twain, studying the business with interest, learned that Redpath farmed out his talent in blocks of from six to eight, charging lyceums an average of \$100 a lecturer, and collecting ten per cent commission from the speakers. The usual season, for his performers, was 100 to 110 engagements. Twain saw that Redpath's way was to group one or two of the "big guns" with from five to six lecturers of lesser appeal, thus compelling each lyceum to put up with considerable chaff in order to get the wheat. In the grain were Beecher, Anna Dickinson, John B. Gough, Horace Greeley, Wendell Phillips, Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings, Hayes, the Arctic explorer, Parsons, the Irish orator, and Agassiz, while the chaff was made up of "some twenty or thirty men and women of light consequence and limited reputation."

For the famous stars, Redpath charged from \$200 to \$400, depending upon the size of the particular lyceum, while for the secondary speakers he collected only some \$20 to \$60 each.

The booking system had been in effect now for more than a decade, and as Twain saw, was to kill itself by forcing each lyceum to take "for each house-filler, several of Redpath's house-emptiers."

## 4

But in 1882 none but the most radical guessers could see any danger to the lyceum institution. Barnum had drawn great crowds with his temperance talks, Howells, John Boyle O'Reilly, Robert Burdette, Joaquin Miller, George William Curtis, Lyman Abbott, Edward Everett Hale, De Witt Talmage, General Ben Butler, General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick, had all fattened their purses by platform work. Thomas Nast was being tempted by agents who told him his fame as cartoonist of *Harper's Weekly* would be worth \$40,000 a season to him on the platform if he would draw pictures while he lectured. Ingersoll was reaping huge amounts whenever he cared to speak for money. David R. Locke who, as Petroleum V. Nasby, had acquired national fame by making President Lincoln laugh in the darkest days of the war, was earning, often, as high as \$30,000 in a single season. Major Pond, who now managed Henry Ward Beecher, could book as many halls—and pack them—as Beecher was willing to visit.

The results of all this competition were apparent when Wilde walked onto the stage at Central Music Hall, March 11th. The audience was seen to be sparse, and to respond not at all to Oscar's sallies. One person was noted as showing enthusiasm—Theodore Tilton, member of a box party, who was hearing Wilde for the second time. But critical Chicagoans thought Tilton might be merely feeling good on general principles since his enemy, Beecher, had so recently collapsed on the same stage.

So little curiosity had Chicago about Wilde that no newspaper reported his speech with any attempt at thoroughness. Reporters wrote bored and brief summaries of the new lecture; Wilde had described rooms he had seen in America, carpets of vulgar pattern, and on the walls things which were apparently cracked plates decorated with peacock feathers. He had sat down, somewhere or other, on a badly glued, machine-made chair that creaked; he had seen a "gaudy gilt horror" serving as a mirror, and a "cast-iron monstrosity" masquerading as a chandelier. He said everything had clearly been "made to sell."

He denounced floors carpeted to the wall and advocated replacing them with rugs which exposed a border of parquetry flooring. There should be no heavy furniture, "no Eastlake," and colors should be harmonious. It was all right to have flowers in the rooms, but not too many. Wall paper was better than tapestries. Banish the awkward square piano, with its horrid revolving stool. The approach to the ideal house, Oscar said, should be through a hall nicely wainscoted, with a floor of red brick. A brass knocker on the street door was better than a bell.

"Idle visions!" the expert writer for the *Inter Ocean* pronounced such ideas.

Wilde presented them again in the Twin Cities, whither he hurried at the middle of the month. The Nicollet House in Minneapolis welcomed him first; crowds pursued him almost to his bedroom door. There was the inevitable interview, while he sat on a lounge with a fur robe thrown over it, as usual. A reporter discovered that he was pigeon-toed; the bellboy, that Oscar's shirt-front was "frescoed."

It was written (in St. Paul) that he would "no doubt be glad to meet the bankers, real estate boomers and other 'peasantry' of Minneapolis"—"peasantry" being a reflection of what he was supposed to have said of Indiana Grangers.

To the Academy of Music the lecturer dragged his weary frame and found about 250 people as audience and receipts of hardly more than

\$200. A rumor that students of the University of Minnesota were to put on the "Boston act" fizzled. There was not even that much amusement.

On he went to St. Paul next day, March 16th. Prospects improved. The attendance in the Opera House was fairly good, and of intelligent character. The people listened respectfully to his picture of good house-furnishing, according to the *Minneapolis Journal*, whose editor commented, "Oscar Wilde is a capable man; no doubt of it. So much the more folly for him to so act and dress and loll and espouse a 'yum yum' style that sensible people now turn away." And, "about the newest thing revealed [in the lecture] was that most things in America are so confoundedly, gorgeously vulgar, from east-iron gate-posts all the way up to soup tureens."

He was reported to have taken a fling at American buildings, at the mud in the streets, and at the furniture in hotel rooms. He "really trod on St. Paul's toes," said the *Pioneer Press*. "That subject [dirty streets] is a sensitive point with all St. Paul people, except the city authorities, whose business it is to keep the streets clean."

"People ought not to be too hard on Oscar. He was born so," blurted the *St. Paul Globe*.

In the audience was a man who, when the lecturer appeared, left at once, remarking disgustedly, "I thought this was a the-ayter." And a street car driver was supposed to have jarred the poet by yelling at him, as he saw him walking along: "Hey, Oss-car!"

Much more successful than his lecture was Wilde's appearance at St. Paul's great celebration of St. Patrick's Day in the Opera House the evening of the 17th. The enthusiasm of the Irish for him, and his own desire to live up to being "Speranza's" son, gave him an opportunity entirely outside the field of his lectures. There was a huge crowd, with Archbishop Ireland and others as speakers. In a box sat Wilde, in his evening costume, among stiffly clad Irish patriots and bearded dignitaries.

The *St. Paul Globe* saw Father Shanley appear on the stage, and say that he was "pleased to announce the presence with them of a son of one of Ireland's noblest daughters—of a daughter who in the troubrous times of 1848 by the works of her pen and her noble example did much to keep the fire of patriotism burning brightly in the hearts of Ireland's sons. A son of that noble woman was present in the person of Mr. Oscar Wilde, who had kindly consented to say a few words on this happy occasion, and whom he had the pleasure of introducing.

"As Father Shanley spoke, Mr. Wilde stepped upon the stage, one hand gloved in a white kid, the other bearing a lace handkerchief, and

the long straight brown hair hanging down upon his shoulders. His appearance was greeted with a generous demonstration of applause. Stepping well to the front of the stage he acknowledged his reception by a slight bow and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen [sic], when I gave myself the pleasure of meeting with you tonight, I had not thought I would be called upon to say anything, but would be allowed to sit quietly in my box and enjoy listening to the loving and patriotic sentiments that I knew would be given voice. But the generous response you have given to the mention of the efforts of my mother in Ireland's cause has filled me with a pleasure and a pride that I cannot properly acknowledge. It is also a pleasure to me that I am afforded this opportunity during my visit to America to speak to an audience of my countrymen, a race once the most aristocratic in Europe.

"There was a time before the time of Henry II when Ireland stood at the front of all the nations of Europe in the arts, the sciences, and genuine intellectuality. The few books saved from the general wreck are remarkable for their literary excellence and beauty of illustration. There was a time, too, when Ireland was the university of Europe—when young monks educated in Ireland went forth as educators to all other European countries, while at the same time students from these same countries flocked to Ireland to study . . . under the great masters of Ireland. There was a time when Ireland led all other nations in working in gold. In those times no nation built so splendidly as did Ireland. The cathedrals, monasteries, and other edifices of those days showed a higher style of architecture than that of any other nation.

"Those proud monuments to the genius and intellectuality of Ireland do not exist today. When the English came they were burned. But portions of these blackened moldering walls still remain to remind visitors of the beauty of the work wrought by Ireland, for the pleasure and enjoyment of Ireland in the days of her greatness. But with the coming of the English, art in Ireland came to an end, and it has had no existence for over seven hundred years.

"And he was glad it had not, Oscar continued, 'for art could not live and flourish under a tyrant. Art was an expression of the liberty-loving sentiment of a people. But the artistic sentiment of Ireland was not dead in the hearts of her sons and daughters, though allowed no expression in their native country.'

"It is that sentiment which has induced you to meet here tonight to commemorate our patron saint,' were Oscar's words. 'It finds expression in the love you bear for every running brook of your native land. It is shown in the esteem you bear for the names of the great men

whose deeds and works have shed such luster upon Irish history. And when Ireland gains her independence, its schools of art and other educational branches will be revived and Ireland will regain the proud position she once held among the nations of Europe.' Mr. Wilde concluded his remarks by again thanking the audience for the kindness shown him, and especially for the pleasure given him by the generous expression of love and respect for his honored mother—an expression that would always be remembered as the most grateful of any connected with his visit to America.

"Mr. Wilde's remarks were closely followed by the audience, which testified its appreciation by generous applause as he withdrew from the stage."

## 6

The poet departed from St. Paul, popular with at least one element of its people. But there was burning in him more and more the ambition he nourished along with that of preaching art—to get *Vera; or The Nihilists* produced. *Vera* haunted him, and not with bombs. From St. Paul he wrote to D'Oyly Carte, "I have received your letter about the play: I agree to place it entirely in your hands for production on the terms of my receiving half the profits, and a guarantee of £200 paid down to me on occasion of its production. As regards the cast, I am sure you see yourself how well the part will suit Clara Morris. I am, however, quite aware how *difficile* she is. . . ."

## 7

On March 15th, a lyceum manager, Charles E. Locke, representing D'Oyly Carte, had announced in New York that he had closed a series of twenty lectures to be given by Wilde on the Pacific Coast and in the West between March 22nd and April 15th. As the *Denver Tribune* received the details, Wilde was to receive \$5,000 and have his expenses paid. Other reports were that Wilde was to have a secretary and valet supplied as well.

The agreement, whatever it was, had been made with Wilde before its announcement to the public, and he moved directly from St. Paul to Sioux City, arriving at the Iowa town on Sunday, March 19th, and resting until his first Western appearance on Monday evening.

Driving in a carriage through the country back of the town on Sunday, he found "the brown prairies so somber and lovely." And next morning he was still rhapsodizing about them when a reporter from the *Sioux City Journal* called at his room in the Hubbard House. "They

are," he said, "so different from England, where the grass is green, even in winter." He had already decided that he was going to like the West better than the East, and if he "were to live away from England," he would live in the American mountains of the West. The reporter jotted things down while Wilde talked:

"The people of America understand money-making, but not how to spend it."

"Mr. Wilde complimented the Cincinnati School of Design and the Cooper Institute of New York, and wondered that a great city like Chicago had nothing of the sort.

"Mr. Wilde is kindly, much like a forgiving aunt. His demeanor is ladylike. He occasionally moistened his wrists in a preoccupied way with perfume from a tiny flat vial. His large, liquid eyes rolled upwards at times as he became interested, something as a schoolgirl's when she speaks to an intimate friend of her latest love affair."

Advertised to give "The English Renaissance" Wilde spoke on March 20th, at the Academy of Music, where in the center of the stage a table had been placed on a large shoe box to give an "artistic elevation," one of the crimson table cloths of the Hubbard House dining-room having been flung across it.

The stridently Philistine *Journal* tore the lecturer to bits. He was only a "spiritless namby-pamby nondescript" who could accomplish nothing because he was merely "a caricature on robust manhood."

"We have seen Oscar," the paper declared next day, "and if art is responsible for the like of him, we want no art in ours." There had been only three hundred in the audience, continued the *Journal*, "the majority of them ladies." Wilde, himself, said, a few weeks later, that the audience had been mainly working people and was one of the most intelligent he had had in all America.

Next morning Wilde was in Omaha, where he was to speak at night under the auspices of The Social Art Club, which sought to bring culture to the raw young metropolis of Nebraska. It had not been thirty years since the first settlers had rushed into the new Nebraska Territory, and Omaha was now only fifteen years old. Not yet could it count 30,000 inhabitants, although it was proud of seventeen hotels, twenty churches, booming stockyards, breweries, smelting works, a \$300,000 high school on a hill, and an opera house, Boyd's, property of the mayor. Industrialism had captured the city, and strikes were raging at the smelting works, raging so long that soldiers, regulars, and militia men were on duty. Omaha was unkempt, disheveled, and muddy—almost as muddy as the great Missouri River, which Wilde had crossed at Council Bluffs.

Omaha, as capital of the Northwest cattle kingdom, was full of strange sights for Oscar Wilde—cowboys popping their high heels on



OSCAR WILDE ON OUR CAST-IRON STOVES.  
Another American Institution sat down on.

#### THE RED HOT STOVE

*Thomas Nast pictures the American stove as capable of replying to Wilde's criticisms. "Harper's Weekly," September 9, 1882.*

wooden sidewalks; here and there a ranch-hand wearing a threadbare overcoat of Confederate gray; Indians gliding silently along the streets on moccasined feet.

Even in so disturbed a time, the newspapers kept their readers well

informed about the Aesthete, thanks to the industry of Agent Vale in supplying advance press notices.

"Omaha is not as a rule given to lecture-going, but the remarkably large sale of seats assures a full house for Mr. Wilde," declared the *Herald* on March 19th. A Chalk Club man wrote some verses for the *Bee* beginning:

Oh, Oscar Wilde,  
Aesthetic, mild,  
With hair well iled,  
And shirt front "biled."  
Oh, poet and scholar,  
You charge but a dollar  
For sight of your collar  
Which we willingly pay,  
And bless the bright day  
You happened our way.  
Midst Ireland's commotion  
You seized on the notion  
To cross the wide ocean  
To teach a great nation  
Its proper relation  
And aesthetic station. . . .

A dozen more lines, then the "ode" ended with:

Dear Oscar, good-by;  
We're too busy to cry  
And too hurried to buy  
Us a collar, shoo-fly!

The editor was roused to remark that the poem was "composed merely to show the extent to which human depravity can go."

The lecture in Boyd's opera house proved to be the one on "Decorative Art" with insertions from the one on house decoration. The *Bee* reporter said, "The speaker described his impressions of many American houses, badly designed, arranged with poor taste, filled with horrible and dishonest furniture, ornamented with vulgar paper upon the walls and vulgar carpets upon the floor."

There was a fair crowd, including citizens of consequence. The Honorable James W. Savage introduced Oscar. That some of those present had attended under a false impression was suggested in the *Herald*:

"Has this Oscar Wilde troupe ever shown here before?" asked a casual theater-goer yesterday.

"Why, no; they've only been out two months from Ireland."

"Are they any good?"

"I suppose so; they draw pretty well."

"I guess I'll have to go; everybody seems to be getting a ticket.  
What do they play?"

"Haven't seen the bills."

"The inquirer rushed over to the Boyd and got a couple of seats, and tonight he will be there with his girl to see 'What the Oscar Wilde troupe play.'"

The editorials in the *Bee* (morning) and the *Herald* (evening) were respectful. The hearers, observed the *Herald*, could bear witness to the "fidelity of his teachings," and his lecture was "a blistering rebuke to the materialism of the age." It was a "rational and truthful outline of the relation of art to the lives of the people, and yet many men and women sneer at Oscar Wilde," whose "peculiar personal manner and attire . . . have really nothing to do with the simple and salutary thought underlying his strangeness."

The *Bee* was likewise laudatory.

It had remained for a tough cow-town to be the first American city to give the Aesthete unanimous press approval.

That Wilde had criticized American furniture in Omaha was news worth quick transmission to England, where the Wild Westernism of the Nebraska town was perhaps better publicized than in Boston or Philadelphia, so much had Englishmen invested, during the past decade, in American cattle, and so many had been the "younger sons" to seek their fortunes on the American plains.

Soon a verse was being read and re-read and quoted in London:

What a shame and what a pity,  
In the streets of London city  
    Mr. Wilde is seen no more.  
Far from Piccadilly banished,  
He to Omaha has vanished,  
    Horrid place which swells ignore.

On his back a coat he beareth  
Much as Sir John Bennett weareth,  
    Made of velvet—strange array,  
Legs Apollo might have sighed for,  
Or great Hercules have died for  
    His knee breeches now display.

Waving sunflower and the lily  
He calls all the houses "illy"  
Decorated and designed.  
For of taste they've not a tittle  
They may chew and they may whittle  
But they're all born color blind.

## 8

Oscar had no time to enjoy Omaha society or look at its packing-houses.

He left at noon the day after his lecture, accompanied by Vale. A *Bee* reporter busily saw him off, and heard him say that he "presumed he had a tedious and monotonous ride before him." He was assured that the rugged mountain scenery was very fine.

"Oh, how very beautiful that will be!" exclaimed Oscar, then he asked, "Will we see any wild animals—from the cars, I mean?"

"Oh, yes. You will see jack rabbits between here and Cheyenne, and herds of antelopes on the mountains, and here and there a drove of grizzly bears, buffalo, and Rocky Mountain lions."

"How unutterably lovely," Oscar murmured.

The newspaperman remarked that Oscar looked like "Big Nose George, the famous mountain bandit."

Not like Henry Ward Beecher, after all!

The Union Pacific train pulled out. Oscar and Vale settled back for the voyage toward the sunset, the Golden Gate, the Eldorado of the Forty-niner—and more lecture receipts.

## 9

## AESTHETES IN LEATHER

TWO steel rails running west straight into the plains, running 1,918 miles to the Pacific Ocean—a train running for 100 hours between Omaha and San Francisco—a train averaging at the most twenty miles an hour, usually eighteen. Fare, first class \$100, plus \$14 for Pullman; second class \$75; immigrant class \$45. Immigrants, however, went on other trains, seven-and-a-half-day trains—riding in worn-out, filthy cars,

attached to slow freight and cattle trains, amid a stench worse than steerage, "and cooking for themselves on stoves in the cars."

One hundred hours for Oscar Wilde. He saw by the timetable that his train would stop at each of 230 stations—every depot along the way. No dining cars on the train; thirty-minute stops would be made at wayside restaurants—\$1 a meal—a prospect most unaesthetic.

In due time the train stopped and the frenzied ringing of a gong was heard. "Dinner! All out for dinner!" A bellowing man beat a copper gong in the doorway of a low board shanty and cried that dinner was being served within. Down the aisle of the sleeping car the passengers tore, down the steps and into the shack.

The long-haired Aesthete trailed along. Seating himself at a counter or at a small table, waitresses banged eight small dishes around him—hot beefsteak, cold roast antelope, cold chicken, ham and poached eggs, stewed tomatoes, cold boiled potatoes and, for dessert, four thin buckwheat hot cakes, piled high and swimming in golden syrup. Tea cold, tea hot, coffee hot, or water, he could have his choice.

Half done with his meal, the traveler heard the engine's whistle start a wrathful summons, heard the conductor and the brakemen cry, "All aboard!" saw his fellow-passengers break for the door, trampling waitresses, tossing coins, dashing for the cars in terror of being left.

Conductors tried to help break the monotony. W. G. Marshall, the British traveler who had made the trip shortly before, had seen the conductor sit up to a little eight-stop organ at one end of the car, play it, sing songs, ask the passengers to join in, get up and ask if some of them wouldn't like to take a whirl at it.

Again the slow lurching westward. The trainman told how the passengers not long ago had been able to shoot buffalo from the train windows. He drew his own revolver and banged at a slowly receding telegraph pole; he invited the passengers to do the same. Some drew their weapons and blazed away. The conductor called attention to the prairie dogs. Foreigners would not have seen them; strange rodents sitting up now in the warming sunshine of late March to stare at the iron horse, then flip down through the doors of their hole-homes into chattering safety. The conductor and his armed passengers bombarded the dogs without mercy or damage.

Soon green grass would be coming up to meet the springtime—prairie grass and buffalo grass. The first would grow tall and cover the plains—cover all but the fields that were cultivated along the streams in the Platte River Valley which ran for 200 miles west of Omaha. Buffalo grass would come up thick as hair on a dog's back.

No, there were no more buffalo. Not in this immediate part of the

West; they had been killed off by hunters, massacred for their hides, tongues and humps.

No, no more Indians to shoot arrows at the train or to try tripping it by stretching lariats from telegraph pole to telegraph pole across the tracks. There were plenty of Indians over this part of the West, but they made war no more. The Apaches were still causing trouble down near the Mexican border, but the Indians of the plains had given up their fight against the white man, so people thought. No, the train would not pass near Little Big Horn, where General Custer had been killed only twelve years before.

This railroad, the Union Pacific, had been the last great blow that had broken the Indian's power. It had brought in settlers by thousands.

Mr. Wilde had already heard of the wonders of this railroad? Right where the steel rails now ran, had been seen only twenty years ago the wagon ruts first worn by the Forty-niners, pushing toward California and the gold fields. In 1862 Congress had granted the Pacific Railroad a charter, thinking the whole thing so difficult that it would take fourteen years to complete. But it had been done in exactly six years, two months and ten days, with track laid by two forces, one working eastward, one westward. The Pacific group had started first—started from Sacramento on February 22, 1863, while the Omaha group had not got under way until two years later. But when the westward work began, it had gone faster, since it had fewer rocks to contend with, and was manned so largely by veterans of the Union Army, fellows who had learned the trick of building railroads rapidly in an enemy's country. To lay down a pick-ax, seize a rifle and drive away Indians was, after all, little different from what they had done in the South. The eastward-pointing gangs had been largely Chinese coolies untrained in these matters.

When Mr. Wilde got to San Francisco he would find out about these Chinese.

More important to the gabbling conductor was the fact that railroad-ing had taken on a new air of romance ever since the two work gangs had met at Promontory, Utah, May 10, 1869, and with lavish ceremony had driven the last spike that completed the Pacific Railroad—The Golden Spike.

Now a man could travel from New York to San Francisco in a week.

The conductor would be well fortified against the charge reformers were making that the great road had been laid in bribery and corruption. Quibblers were saying that this had been typical of what had happened all over the country since the war—everything handed over to

the get-rich-quick industrialists. Hadn't Congress granted 20,000,000 acres of public domain to the railroaders—and large sums of money beside?

You had to give capitalists an incentive to take risks. You must expect a certain amount of stealing if you wanted a big thing done. Anything that helped the greatest number was not to be had without bribing a few individuals.

Look out of the window; wasn't there enough land for all? The world was America's oyster! Open it!

Looking out at the flat expanse Wilde stored up impressions he would summarize for English listeners, later on: "The prairies reminded me of a piece of blotting paper."

The train rattled on.

## 2

Three hundred and forty miles out of Omaha the conductor came through the train calling, "Julesburg! Julesburg!" and locking the doors. To a startled Englishman the native passengers would explain that Julesburg was "the wickedest town in America"—a Wild West cow-town where five years ago robbers had held up the train, robbed the express car of \$20,000, and repeated the process some two or three years later.

Not much danger now, and no use to put up a fight if the highwaymen should come, for they always got the drop on you before they made a move. Things were quieter than they used to be. The James boys—Mr. Wilde had heard of them?—the most desperate gang in the West? They had been raiding for more than fifteen years—nobody could catch them—not even the Pinkertons, those sleuths who guarded the railroads, the express companies, the banks of the country. There was a legend that Frank and Jesse James had caught two of the detectives, killed them and expressed their bodies C.O.D. to Allan Pinkerton in Chicago.

But Jesse was lying low now; nobody knew just where. All the law forces couldn't find him.

The Wild West was dying.

Farms had cut up the Platte River valley which the train was just leaving, and fences were edging into the great grass ocean beyond. There had been an increase of almost seventy-five per cent in farms out here in the past ten years—homesteads. The Government gave you land if you'd agree to make it your home.

The big ranches of the plains were beginning to go, just as the big

plantations of the South had gone in the last decade—cut up into little farms. The average size of an American farm had been around 200 acres in 1860, 153 acres in 1870 and only 134 in 1880.

Out here, in the real West, was the only place where the old American dream of the independent agriculturalist was still visible. Everywhere else it was disappearing. Renters were taking the place of farm-owners more and more in the Middle West and the South, just as they had done earlier in the East. Two years ago, the census had shown that seventy-nine per cent of midlanders had owned their own farms, while in the West it had been almost eighty-eight per cent. Experts were saying that within seven or eight years the Middle Western figure would be down to around seventy-five per cent and would keep on going down.

Western politicians, riding the trains from Washington, were saying that the farmer was being sacrificed to the "bloated bondholders" and "sound money harpies" of the Atlantic seaboard.

They mentioned the irony of what had happened to the farmer as a result of the Civil War. During that conflict free lands had brought out so many emigrants that the population on Western farms had increased seventy-three per cent by 1870, thirty-six per cent more by 1880. Emerson phrased it well, saying that the war had "unrolled a map of the Union, had hung it in every man's home." U. S. Grant had stated it more clearly in 1879 when he had said how sad it was to see how "in peace men vegetated too much in the place of their birth. War tore them from their homes, and when it was over left them to seek the best place for developing their talents and themselves, to develop the territories, to build the railroads and to open mines and farms."

It was one of the few virtues he had ever seen in war.

But, said the farmer "Radicals" in 1882, the total number of agrarians was declining in spite of all this Western increase. Farm boys were going to town to work in factories, for the Government was aiding industry more than agriculture. The farmers' prices might be helped now and then by droughts, such as the severe one last summer, in 1881, but his income would surely drift lower while the cost of what he bought would keep going up.

From the car window Mr. Wilde could see ranches. If he had time to stop he could see the only Americans who would still fit, in some measure, into his notions of handicraft and art—the cowboys. Cowboys preparing for the spring round-up of cattle scattered like night stars across the heavens—cowboys singing songs they had made up themselves, not songs made to sell.

Glimpses of men in wide, high-crowned hats, squatting in bunkhouse doors, waving at the train, looking up from hackamores they were braid-

ing out of sliced raw-hide, from buckskins they were tanning, from saddles, bridles, chaps, boots, revolver holsters, they were decorating—aesthetes in leather.

Here and there on the Western frontier Wilde could see snatches of the system used by the midland civilization thirty, forty years before—women inventing designs for quilts; miners hammering out beautiful candlesticks; blacksmiths sharpening tools and saying, “It’s wine; it’s straw, now,” or, “It’s claret,” as they watched colors wax and wane at the forge; wagon-men making, with axes, everything from tongue to spokes, and boasting of their art; farmers whittling ax-handles to a certain pleasing shape; gunsmiths cutting stocks to a particular lean, graceful line; adze-men deftly hewing neck-yokes and wheat-cradles to a precise curve; households making soap and candles, drying food; women gathering leaves of certain hues and kinds for the delicate job of dyeing cloth they had spun; bootmakers fashioning footwear just so, stitching on red tops and brass toes—workmen doing things their own way and making whatever they made complete—crude perhaps, perhaps not—but brought by two hands from the raw to the finished state. No piecework.

The train rattled on.

### 3

In dreary stretches of travel, such as this, Wilde read the American newspapers and magazines which his secretary had bought to clip.

March 1, Washington: Anthony Comstock lectured here last night. In his career he has secured the arrest of 582 persons and fined 251 for a total of \$63,931; destroyed 27,584 pounds of immoral books and 203,238 pounds of obscene pictures. Such achievements are sufficient to win for Mr. Comstock the gratitude of respectable people everywhere. He is working now against the lottery business. The sale of lottery tickets in twenty cities during one year totaled \$1,755,090.87, with net profits to owners in six cities during six years a million and a half. There are 550 “policy dens” in New York.

March 2, New York: A near panic on the Stock Exchange last week, chiefly in stocks of Southern railroads. Clique manipulation. Bears shaking out the weak holders. *The Nation* scores “the great speculators who now command such enormous masses of capital that they make great raids without difficulty and without giving any sign. Some of the great operators, too, make the nearest approach to Satanic methods in their falsehood, treachery, and indifference to the fate of friends and foes, which the modern business world has yet witnessed.”

March 9, Chicago: St. Louis has spent \$1,000,000 on macadamizing her streets during the last decade and has nothing to show for it but mud.

March 9, London: Mrs. Langtry's terms to theatrical managers are sixty per cent of the gross receipts.

March 9, Philadelphia: The Gas Trust is accused of defrauding the city government. In municipal mismanagement Philadelphia has certainly held her own.

March 10, Washington: The whole country is agitated over the bill in Congress to make smallpox vaccination compulsory. The disease is epidemic in many sections.

March 12, Portland, Maine: Honorable Neal Dow, father of temperance legislation, attacks hazing and tobacco as evils of modern colleges.

March 15, London: Le Sage, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, cabled Barnum asking reconsideration of purchase of Jumbo from London Zoo, as 200 British children are distressed. Barnum cabled answer:

"My compliments to editors *London Daily Telegraph* and British nation. Fifty-one million American citizens anxiously await Jumbo's arrival. My forty years' invariable practice of exhibiting the best money could produce makes Jumbo's presence here imperative. £100,000 no inducement to cancel purchase. My largest tent seats 30,000 and is filled twice daily. . . . In December next I visit Australia in person with Jumbo and my entire mammoth combination of seven shows via California, thence Suez Canal, following summer in London. I shall then exhibit in every prominent city in Great Britain. May afterward return Jumbo to his old place. Wishing British nation, *Daily Telegraph*, and Jumbo long life and prosperity, I am the public's obedient servant, P. T. Barnum."

March 16, New York: Jay Gould rumored to have been so shaken in Wall Street that he applied to W. H. Vanderbilt for a loan of ten millions. To quiet the tale Gould sent for three friends and showed them fifty million in securities in his safe. Gould has absorbed and consolidated so much of the avalanche of wealth of the country that any attack on his credit is getting to be much more like an attack on the credit of the United States.

March 16, Indianapolis: A woman in Indiana has swallowed forty-six buttons in an attempt to commit suicide.

March 16, New York: William Vanderbilt says railroad war is practically settled. Insanity to prolong it. Agreement is to be for five years. Says transportation done at less profit than any other business in country. Says stocks of good roads are too low. Says bears are "mean men,

selling property of widows and orphans and growing rich. These men usually leave in Wall Street all they make. They are mean, cheap men, as my father used to say."

March 17, Paris: Two years ago Sarah Bernhardt was photographed by Melandin lying in a coffin of white satin on condition that no pictures were to be sold till after her death, which she promised in a year. After year was up he wrote her in New York that her contract was broken. "Patience," she wired him. A few days ago she came back from Russia and he has referred case to tribunal of commerce of Paris.

The train rattled on.

#### 4

"Hillsdale! Hillsdale!" called the conductor. "In a few minutes you will see the Rockies!"

Faces at the windows looking, peering.

There they were! Or was it only thunderheads on the western horizon? "That," said the conductor, "that big one capped with snow is Long's Peak; stands 14,270 feet high."

Silence, as the passengers stared at the vast and mysterious chain—more awesome than the Alps which Oscar Wilde had visited. Suddenly the mountains were shut from sight, the windows went black and the passengers realized that the lamps had been lighted. The conductor explained that the train was passing through a snow-shed, a tunnel, and that they would see more of them from now on.

"Cheyenne! Cheyenne! The Magic City of the Plains!"

The largest city between Omaha and San Francisco came up beside the windows. Passengers would say that it was one of the West's toughest, and although it had grown more civilized of late, you could still hear a desperado on the streets talking about having a man for breakfast. That meant he had killed someone last night.

To the south, 106 miles away, lay Denver, center of the mining craze. Wilde would see it on his way back. Now the Pacific Railroad bore straight on. On between snow-sheds, catching glimpses of red granite tumbled and slashed, fir trees—higher and higher—

"Sherman! Sherman! Highest point on the road; 8,242 feet above sea level."

A granite monument sixty feet high stood at Sherman, and on it the words, "In memory of Oakes Ames and Oliver Ames." The Massachusetts brothers had been big men in the building of the road, and their success was to be commemorated even if they had been tarred with the



*The cover of one of the ten-cent comic paper-backed publications satirizing Oscar Wilde, issued in 1882. From the "Bibliography of Oscar Wilde."*

scandal which had broken when their railroad construction company, the Crédit Mobilier, was exposed as having fattened the purses of many congressmen. What did it matter? Businessmen had to take politicians as they found them, and what if politicians went into business too? The country had to go forward, didn't it?

The train rattled on, on down upon the Laramie plains, where in summer 165,000 head of live stock grazed.

"Laramie! Laramie! Gem City of the Mountains!"

The station platform cluttered with stuffed heads of bear, deer, elk, mountain rams. On to Green River, the desert beginning to stretch south—the beginnings of the Painted Desert which ran to Mexico—fantastic, tortured, glittering in the spring sun.

"Green River! Green River!"

At station-stops now, Chinamen and Indians were seen—also bearded, sun-baked horsemen who were whispered to be the notorious Mormons. Utah was just ahead.

"Echo Cañon! Echo Cañon!"

The passengers crowded the steps of the rear car to see the cliffs.

From "Pulpit Rock," Brigham Young was said to have preached. The conductor seemed to believe it, but native passengers winked. Midway of the primeval gash known as the cañon, the train halted while the engineer sounded assorted whistle-toots to exhibit the echoes.

On past the beautiful Wasatch Mountains, on into Great Salt Lake Valley.

"Ogden! Ogden!"

Wilde and his attendants alighted. Newspapers were bought.

Longfellow was dead; the old poet had disappeared from life as a white cloud, lit by the sinking sun, drifts toward the eastern horizon. Here and there over America women wept as they heard the news, remembering how they had loved his poems as a child. "The Children's Poet" was gone.

Wilde was phrasing, in his mind, the epitaph he would utter, within a few days, in Salt Lake City—"Longfellow was himself a beautiful poem, more beautiful than anything he ever wrote."

There was small time, however, for polishing an epigram. Gongs were banging, restaurant-runners were snatching at passengers, urging "clean meals for seventy-five cents." Change to the Silver Palace cars of the Central Pacific Railroad. Start again. In time, Promontory Point, where the golden spike was driven; past Milk Creek where Indians massacred United States troops in 1870—into Nevada over the Sierras.

"Reno! Reno!"

Up Truckee Mountain into a snow-shed twenty-eight miles long; out into the spring sun—passing mining villages so slowly that the signs could be read: "Gospel Gulch, Petticoat Slide, Chucklehead Diggings, You Bet, Groundhog's Glory, Blue Belly Ravine."

Out onto a long river bottom whose green leaves and grass were like a benediction after the snow in mountain passes.

"Sacramento! Sacramento!"

Capital of California, orange trees, fig trees, elegant villa residences—21,000 people—policemen on the station platform wearing black Alpine hats with gold bands—voices telling how here Captain John A. Sutter found gold, before the city was thought of—in fact his discovery had started the city, and when gold-crazy hordes raced in, they ruined his trading-post, his mills, his lands, his fortune.

## 5

All along the line crowds large or small had gathered to see Oscar Wilde, and in many towns west of the Sierras they had jeered. Hooting and laughing pranksters, dressed in outlandish imitation of his reputed garb, had been on the platform at Corinne, Utah, and had made vain efforts to invade his car. "Gem cities," "magic cities," "golden cities," had hooted at a man for being too-too poetic.

Several towns had seen him in his long hair and flower come smiling to the steps or rear end of the train to beam upon them.

Inside the train, however, there had been more mirth than on the outside, for the beaming figure had not been Oscar Wilde, but John Howson, the Bunthorne of the Comley-Barton Opera Troupe, which was playing *Patience* through the West and which had taken the train further back. Mr. Howson had, on seeing what was up, donned his Bunthorne costume and amused himself with the impersonation.

While the train waited at Sacramento, into Wilde's car came a man bearing flowers. He presented them to the poet, saying they were from a lady of the city and that he was a reporter for the *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, and that he wished to ride with him all the way to San Francisco, 135 miles, in order to have a full talk. He would give Wilde a "fair show" in the interview, he said.

Oscar was cordial, invited the man to breakfast, and proceeded to charm the Westerner so much that next day, March 26th, the *Record-Union* hailed him in two columns as "the poor man's friend," "the most misrepresented foreigner that ever visited our shores," "a genial

companion and admirable conversationalist," a man "of sincere earnestness."

That weeks among the midlands and plains and mountains of the West had done something to the Aesthete was apparent in what the reporter saw and heard.

Wilde was now "dressed plainly to severity," wearing a simple scarf without jewelry, and, on his head, "a broad-brimmed white sombrero, decidedly Spanish in style." And if the poet's features were "almost effeminate in apparent lack of vigor and force" they "believe the man, whose conversation proves him to be shrewd, perfectly self-possessed, and entirely able to take care of himself in the world."

Contact with common people had refreshed his mind as to Ruskinism. To the *Record-Union* man he broke loose as he had once in Philadelphia so soon after landing in America:

"I hope the masses will come to be the creators in art . . . that art will soon cease to be simply the accomplishment and luxury of the rich. . . . We must teach the people to use their hands in art. All that is artistic must begin in handicraft. . . . I would dignify labor by stripping it of its degradation and by developing all that is beautiful in the laborer's surroundings and opening his eyes to it. Ah, I would speak to the hard-working people, whom I wish I could reach through the prejudice that shuts them and me away from each other.

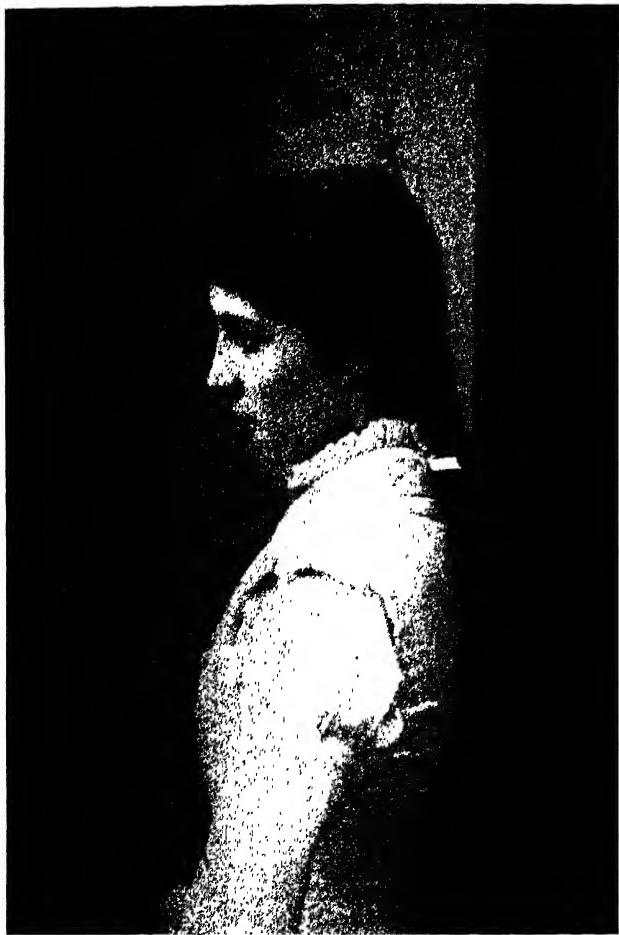
"Why, it is to the mechanics and workers of your country that I look for the triumph that must come. Back in the East, I met a railroad-repairer. It was his daily business. He talked to me, wanted to know what we were trying to do. Why, that man quoted Pope to me, analyzed his method, discussed my positions with me, understood me, and where he doubted gave his reasons in homely phrases, but unmistakably and clearly. He took an interest in the best of life, was keen, kindly, receptive and pugnacious in need, withal—altogether a charming fellow.

"Now in England, in men of his class, such a conversation would be simply impossible. Here I learn that a man is fairly representative of a myriad."

Wilde went on, "There is too much talk of taking the spectacular and emotional off the stage and replacing it with dramas that appeal to the intellect and reason." He wanted the stage to teach "beauty of dress, richness of scenery and graceful groupings." The trouble was with producers who "belittle these spectacular effects by sensational scenes of the most improbable kind, and work up all sorts of morbid situations, with flying trains and sinking steamers, and all that."

The *Record-Union* man asked him if the absence of art in America





LILY LANGTRY

*Photograph by W. and D. Downey.*

wasn't a drawback. He had understood Wilde had said in his first lecture that it was an advantage.

"No art is better than bad art," Wilde explained. "Architecture in England is deteriorating. The handicrafts are falling into disrepute . . . there is far more independence here. The American workmen will never submit to be, like English workmen, made into machines as soulless and ignoble as the whirling wheels of machinery. . . . The moment art becomes a luxury it loses. . . . Luxury gives us the gaudy, the vulgar, the transient. It may help but it never creates art. . . . It is not necessary to have great natural wonders at home to develop art. The landscapes of Italy are all-satisfying, and so the Italian artist does not reproduce them. You must go to the cloudy, the misty lands, for great landscape painters."

The newsman asked if all the personal ridicule had affected his judgment of the American people.

"I rarely think of it," said Wilde, "and when I do, I think nothing of it."

"So you do not fear ridicule?"

"Indeed no. I want what I have to advance to stand on its own merit. I ask no quarter."

## 6

The train stopped at a small station and men clambered on asking for "Oscar Wilde." They were San Franciscans from the theater, Platt's Hall, where he was to speak, and from the newspapers. One of the latter was from the *Examiner* who, while he plied the visitor with questions and took down answers, noted that Wilde had a habit of brushing loose hair behind his ears. Had the trip overland been pleasant?

"Partly," said Wilde, with "dignified courtesy"; "it has been excessively long and tedious."

The newsman, thinking of Wilde's deflation of the Niagara and the Atlantic, ventured, "Does the mountain scenery meet your expectations?"

"Hardly, I saw it at an unfavorable time, I suppose. The view from the top of the Sierra Nevadas, however, was beautiful."

Was Mr. Wilde disappointed with America and Americans?

"The further West one comes, the more there is to like," said the poet. "The Western people are much more genial than those of the East, and I fancy that I shall be greatly pleased with California." He smiled when the reporter assured him that Californians would never think of

showing him disrespect as Boston had done. "I like your country and its people," Wilde went on, and repeated his lecture-phrase about there being something quickening in a young country. The onlookers remembered that he was said to be but twenty-six.

Pressed as to his favorite among his own works, he admitted it to be "Charmides," and pronounced it his "most finished and perfect," although Americans have "very kindly taken to my 'Ave Imperatrix.'"

"Does the 'Sonnet to Liberty' voice your political creed?"

Wilde asked in an earnest, almost pathetic, tone, "You mean the sonnet beginning—

Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes  
See nothing save their own unlovely woe,  
Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know?

"No, that is not my political creed. I wrote that when I was younger. Perhaps something of the fire of youth prompted it."

"If you would like to know my political creed," Wilde continued after a short pause, "read the 'Libertis Sacra Fames'—I think it is the seventh sonnet."

The reporter copied it, later, for his readers, and found it to be a poem to the Republican State where "every man is kinglike," but advocating autocracy rather than "let clamorous demagogues betray our freedom with the kiss of anarchy."

The conversation turned back to Wilde's life and he said he felt proud of his birth and parentage. "I live in London for its artistic life and opportunities. There is no lack of culture in Ireland, but it is nearly all absorbed in politics. Had I remained there my career would have been a political one."

"Long Wharf! Long Wharf!" cried the conductor.

Wilde, towering above his interviewers and bending low to hear their questions, passed into the new depot, where a crowd had already gathered around the porter who had gone before with Wilde's valise and shaggy fur overcoat. Everybody had read about the overcoat. As the celebrity entered, the Sunday crowd which had gathered—many coming across from San Francisco—looked quietly at him. There was no noise, no sound from the onlookers.

Scores poured down to the Oakland wharf and walked behind him onto the ferryboat which would cross to the metropolis.

He strode to the rail, turned his back on the crowd, and stared at the spectacle on the city's hills. The *Examiner* man, looking over Wilde's shoulder, tried to see it with the newcomer's eyes—"the sea-green bay, spangled with grassy Yerba Buena, and the gold of Alcatraz against

backgrounds of black and indigo, the far-off woody mountain summits, and curving shore-lines, the Golden Gate lost in a sunlit mist beyond, and at San Francisco's feet, a mist from which rose the tall straight masts of merchant ships."

Wilde asked about the Chinese in the town and fingers pointed out to him about where their quarters would be.

"Chinese art," he volunteered, "possesses no elements of beauty; the horrible and grotesque appearing to be standards of perfection. I have seen much that is admirable in Japanese but nothing of excellence in Chinese art. When I was a lad I heard a Chinese fiddle at the Paris Exposition, but I could discern no music in it."

Behind him, the Sacramento newspaperman noted how the crowds pushed quietly up to see him and then passed on. They saw, the *Examiner* noted, "a black velvet coat, strong square shoulders, manly waist and hips, pants dun-brown, highly polished pointed shoes, velvet waistcoat, low wide collar, tie folded wide, yellow gloves, a withered bouquet of heliotrope, daisy, and tuberose in his coat-front and long hair hanging below a sombrero."

Was this what had driven the Easterners crazy?

For almost a quarter of a century all Westerners had associated long hair with men of daring and adventure. On the plains, many cavalry officers, like General Custer, had preserved the shoulder-long locks which they had worn during the Civil War. Civilization had shorn the officers who remained in the East after Appomattox, but in Indian fighting the fanciful and the picturesque fashion, inherited from King Charles's cavaliers, still remained.

## 10

### A THREE-BOTTLE MAN COMES TO CALIFORNIA

LOCKE drove Wilde from the waterfront to the Palace Hotel—a sight, in itself, almost as amazing to an Englishman as had been the immensity of the West.

The famous hostelry covered an entire block, having been built by an expansive Californian, W. C. Ralston, "to eclipse in size, luxuriousness, and splendor every other hotel in the world." It reared seven stories into the air, its every window was bay, it was braced by thick

and lavishly bolted iron bands to withstand earthquake, it had electric fire alarms, every floor had an exclusive annunciator, and a pneumatic letter tube.

There were 2,042 ventilating tubes to the roof, one running upward from every room, every bathroom, and every closet; an immense glass-roofed central court, furnished with palms, rocking chairs, and spittoons, and making room for a carriage driveway in its heart, occupied its middle. On afternoons the hotel band in the music pavilion played *Pinafore* and *Nancy Lee*; in its regal barbershops the unheard-of sum of \$1 was charged for a haircut; shops and stores were all over its first floor; elevators were many and swift; dining-rooms numbered thirteen; the waiters numbered 156, more than in any other hotel in America except the Grand Union at Saratoga.

To so regal an apartment, soon after Wilde had moved in, came the manager of the local lecture, which was due for the following night, Monday, March 27th, in Platt's Hall. The manager was optimistic. The advance sale of seats had been so large that he had already announced a second lecture for March 29th.

San Francisco was a great show town. Did Mr. Wilde know that *Pinafore* had been given here at almost the same time that it had been given in Boston during 1878? The town had twelve theaters, counting the two large Chinese houses. The opera house seated 2,000 and the opera out here was fine. The city knew music—230,000 people demanding the finest in music, drama, food, and wine.

Mr. Wilde could look from his window. Off there lay the Orient whence so much of the city's shipping came. Here were the five ferries that carried, all told, some six million passengers a year between the city and the suburbs along the shores of the bay; down there on the streets were ten lines of horse railroads—1,800 horses at work—fare five cents—and two kinds of cars no other city had—balloon cars and dummy cable cars. The first were small with roofs like an umbrella, and, at the end of the line, the driver pulled a lever to make himself, the horses, and the whole top of the car move about-face on the wheels, ready to start back again. The second were the famous vehicles which had no horses nor visible machinery, but which ran up and down steep hills on an underground cable 1½ inches in diameter—the “grip-man” operating the steel rope with a clamp when he wanted to go and releasing it when he wanted to stop. Maybe Mr. Wilde had heard what the Chinese said of it—the thing had got to be a byword all over America—“No pushee, no pullee—Melican man go like hellee allee samee.”

Monday evening came, and what all the newspapers noted to be the cream of San Francisco society, prominent professional men, and their ladies, crowded Platt's Hall. The *Morning Call*, which espoused Wilde with gusto, described it as "one of the best-dressed, most fashionable, learned, critical, distingué and, in point of fact, the most aesthetic audiences ever assembled within its room space . . . a wealth of beauty and a bewilderment of color." It saw the head-gear in the reserved seats to be "a glowing field of efflorescence especially selected to honor the speaker" . . . and the hall to be decorated with a "tantalizing array of lilies, sunflowers, dahlias, fuchsias, primroses." The men were dressed "in consonance with the well-known character of San Francisco masculines—sober and decorous," although here and there an enthusiastic lover of the dado and the beautiful might be seen "with an aggravated lily in his buttonhole."

At a little after eight o'clock, the *Call* critic saw Wilde in his famous knee breeches, "strut on" looking "not like a man that lived upon sunbeams" and as if "many an ox must have yielded the broad sirloin" to put two hundred pounds upon so large a frame.

Announced as "The English Renaissance," the lecture was Wilde's extensive modification of that earlier paper. Here and there were striking sentences.

"There is no beauty in cast iron, no poetry in the steam engine. The value of the telephone is the value of what two people have to say. . . . Give children beauty, not the record of bloody slaughters and barbarous brawls as they call history, or of the latitude and longitudes of places nobody cares to visit, as they call geography."

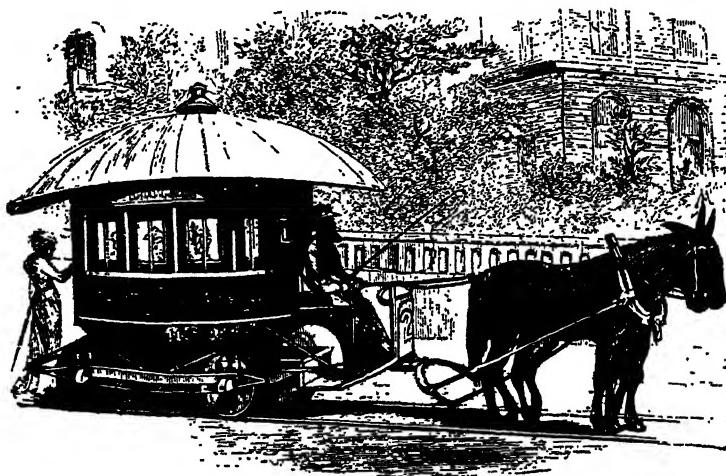
When Wilde was done, the audience applauded—it had laughed spiritedly at several of his sallies. Attention had been all that he could have asked. He was pleased, so was San Francisco, and the newspapers next day reminded their readers that Wilde would talk again, on Wednesday evening, giving his second lecture, "Art Decoration." Tuesday he would appear on an Oakland platform and Thursday at San Jose. This would cover the larger towns, San Francisco having some 235,000 people; Sacramento, 22,000; San Jose, 13,000. Los Angeles, to the south, had too few inhabitants to make the long trip worth while —less than 12,000.

On all scores, it was Wilde's happiest engagement so far. Social leaders called. Smart men of fashion showed him the sights, pointed out to him, on the streets, boys and young men who were "hoodlums"—

reputedly members of the petty-criminal bands which the police seemed unable to control. The hoodlums robbed small merchants, deviled and assaulted pacific Chinese, and kept up an impish practice of following "swells" on the streets and "telling lewd stories" loudly enough to encarnadine the ears of fine ladies.

Wilde's hosts took him through Chinatown, passing along Jackson Street, halting at stores, restaurants, theaters, and opium dens.

A few days later Wilde told a newspaper reporter, "I was delighted



### THE BALLOON CAR

*From "Through America" by W. G. Marshall, 1882.*

with the Chinese quarters . . . they fascinated me. I wish those people had a quarter in London. I should take pleasure in visiting it often. Their theater was plain and the stage was devoid of ornamentation."

The Oriental theater seemed superior to English and American playhouses. "There should be only two things consulted in building a theater," he said, "first the audience, then the actor. The trouble with too many theaters is, they have blue skies, red seats, green hangings, a great display of gilding, and then what is the actor to do? His costumes fall flat. The house, the scenery, and the stage should be only a setting; let the woods used be dark and rich-looking."

His dislike of Chinese art began to vanish. His boyhood hatred of celestial music seemed all at once trivial in the face of his discovery, here in San Francisco, that Chinatown fitted well into his theory that common things should be made beautiful. To a reporter he said, "At the hotel I was obliged to drink my chocolate or coffee out of a cup an

inch thick, and I enjoyed getting down into the Chinese quarters and sitting in a pretty latticed balcony and drinking my tea out of a cup so dainty and delicate that a lady would handle it with care. Yet this was not an expensive place for wealthy people to go to. It was for the common people. The laborers on the railroad came here, with pick and shovel, and drank their refreshing beverage out of a pretty cup of the two beautiful colors, blue and white, while I was thought unworthy of anything better than a cup so thick that it suggested the idea that it was intended as a weapon."

## 3

Wilde heard that the East was ignorant and snobbish to scold California for its attempt to stop Chinese immigration. The East didn't know how serious the thing was. For years—ever since the end of the Civil War, in fact—the white men had been agitated about the coolies who had poured in. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company had begun, in 1866, to ship them over in steerage droves, the big industrialists taking all that they could get to use on the transcontinental railroad or in mines. The administration in Washington, sympathetic to the capitalists and to the sudden opening up of the nation's resources in all lines, had helped supply cheap labor on both coasts. Doors were opened; bring the workers in!

By 1870 there had been 60,000 Chinese, almost all male, west of the Rockies, and a little later when, with the arrival of the great financial panic, jobs had become scarce and white workingmen were starving, the jobless Anglo-Saxons and Celts of California had begun mobbing the Celestials, shouting, truly enough, that the yellow man could live and work on what a white man could not. An Irish drayman with a mesmerizing tongue, Dennis Kearney, had risen in San Francisco sand lots in 1877 to cry, over and over, "The Chinese must go." Riots had raged, frightened Chinamen had darted like rabbits up alleys, into holes, had been caught by the cues and popped on the head. Bret Harte's poem, "Plain Talk from Truthful James," descriptive of the heathen Chinese's ways that were dark and tricks that were vain, particularly in a card game, had been read from coast to coast.

During the hectic railroad strikes of Seventy-seven, there were laborers all over America to give sympathy and support to the sand-lotters. Kearney had organized "The Workingman's Party of California," had been jailed, but had drawn the masses to his program which called for fewer hours of labor, abolition of national banks, honesty on the part of office-holders and, in remorseless refrain, "The

Chinese Must Go!" He cried, "Bullets must replace ballots," if ever the workingman was to escape the persecutions of "thieving millionaires" and "the shoddy aristocrats."

Both national political parties had been alarmed, and the Republican leaders in Washington had told their friends, the industrialists, that they could no longer guarantee them cheap yellow help in unlimited amounts. A new treaty had been made with the Empire of China in November, 1880, recognizing the right to limit coolie immigration, and now Congress was about to pass a bill suspending Chinese immigration for twenty years. It was being said that President Arthur would veto it, but would sign one that would stop it for ten years.

All California was seething because Wendell Phillips, the razor-tongued old reformer, and Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts were flaying the bill as anti-American, and because *The Independent* was declaring that Chinese immigration had, in fact, been decreasing since 1870, that men who talked about "The Mongolian Invasion" had nothing but "a fit of the fidgets," and that, "There has never been anything more consummately stupid than the pretended horror which springs from the hoodlums of San Francisco who are themselves a set of miserable vagabonds. . . . Politicians in California have taken it up for party purposes and are against an industrious, peaceable, and inoffensive people."

Sober Californians were admitting that it was true that Celestials were not coming to America as rapidly as once they had done, but that the 60,000 yellow men west of the Rockies had grown to 105,463 by 1880—the census said so, and that California's 49,000 in 1870 was now over 75,000—a rate of increase proportionate to that of the whites.

The figures were convincing to congressmen. The Chinese might not have to go, but they must not grow.

#### 4

His trip to Oakland accomplished, and the lecture well received, Wilde came again to Platt's Hall on the evening of March 29th. "The audience," said George Hearst's *Examiner*, "was hardly less in number than on the evening of the first lecture and was composed largely of women. Although many felt that the lecture was longer than it need have been, it was listened to patiently and with marked attention, applause and ripples of laughter constantly greeting the Aesthete's expressions of disgust at the sad lack of taste evinced by Americans."

It was Wilde's lecture on home decoration, with additional blasts against the American system of "secondhand" articles. Machine-made



#### SCIENCE OF THE BEAUTIFUL

*"Oscar Wilde and the 'Science of the Beautiful.'" "The Plain Dealer,"  
Cleveland, February 18, 1882.*



#### PACKING PLANT

*Killing hogs in the Cincinnati packing plants. "Frank Leslie's Illus-*



furniture, "dreadful monstrosities called cast-iron stoves," he scored with increasing bitterness. Pictures hung in hallways were atrocious; "hang them where time can be had to look at them." He called hat-



ELATION OF THE "HEATHEN CHINER" OVER A RECENT EVENT IN SAN FRANCISCO.

#### KEARNEY IN JAIL

*Kearney, agitator against the Chinese in California, is jailed. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," April 3, 1880.*

racks "dreadful instruments of torture." A hall should have a large oak chest, painted, for hats and cloaks. There should be no stuffed birds on mantels unless the marble was ingrained and the wood carved. The *Examiner's* reporter caught sentences:

"Good work cannot be done in modern plaster, it dries too quickly.  
Modern windows are too small; they should so be arranged that

the light is good for reading. . . . The Queen Anne style is best for all modern furniture. . . . How sturdily and honestly furniture was made in Colonial times. . . . The fireplace should never be a grate, but open, with brass firedogs and tongs. . . . If the mantel is, unfortunately, marble cover it with embroidered velvet. . . . Chandeliers or gas from the center should never be used. . . . Pianos should be small in size and painted, never covered with embroidered material, as it deadens the sound. . . . Wall paper should be dark brown with geometrical figures to form a good background for pictures. China is meant to be used, and it is foolish to place delicate china on a mantelpiece and drink from delft. . . . If a thing cannot be used without being broken, the owner does not deserve it. . . . Photographs should never be hung on walls, but etchings and woodcuts of masters, like Doré, may be. Pictures should have plain wood frames."

Oscar thought woman's dress "in the prevailing modes not good. . . . Men should try to dress like George Washington, whose attire was noble and beautiful."

Again Wilde was pleased with San Francisco and San Francisco with him. Locke announced a third lecture would be given on Saturday afternoon, April 1st, when Mr. Wilde would have returned from San Jose and Sacramento.

## 5

Sacramento prepared to do well by the man whom it had liked as it had read about him in the *Record-Union's* long and friendly description. That newspaper, on Tuesday, March 28th, had announced that Manager Charles E. Locke had arranged for Wilde to visit the city on the following Friday, and that a local individual, D. J. Simmons, had undertaken to manage the affair, guaranteeing Wilde \$500. Admission would be \$1 and citizens were to meet at Houghton's book store that morning. The price was high, and hard work would be necessary to sell enough seats.

Word went over town that the great man would arrive Friday on the noon train from San Francisco, and the *Sacramento Bee* saw quite a crowd gather at the station. Included were three young ladies out to make a grand mash on Oscar.

"They were arrayed in tightly fitting robes and wore belts in which were thrust bunches of artificial lilies and sunflowers. On their hats, trimmings of the same flowers. At the throat, each wore a large sunflower. A bystander remarked that they look just too stunning for anything. Ossie did not arrive, however, and the young ladies quietly

beat a retreat to the waiting-room and there remained hidden until nearly all the people had left the depot. Then they slipped up the railroad track north of Lake Como, all looking much discomfited."

Sacramento was worried until someone remembered that Wilde had lectured at San Jose last night. A crowd met the 2:10 from the south, but still no Oscar. More excitement, then came word that he would arrive on the 7:10 from San Francisco. The evening newspapers kept the bulletins flying, and there were 400 people waiting in the Congregational Church at 7:30. Still no Wilde. Mrs. T. H. Berkey went up to the grand piano and played solos against time. An usher carried flowers to the pulpit. They were from the Bric-a-Brac Club. The hands of the clock crept to 8:15 and Mrs. Berkey was running out of pieces. Then the side door flew open and in came Oscar. The applause was prompt and loud. From 8:20 to 9:25, the 400 heard Wilde's voice flow without a break, speaking "as the perfected phonograph may be supposed to do when art shall have developed all its possibilities and a steady and untiring hand is at the crank." His thought was exquisite, said the critic of the *Record-Union*, "but his manner and method of delivery are insufferable." The critic believed the trouble was "a nasal enunciation which the elocutionist's art can cure" and if Mr. Wilde would wait over, they had some teachers in Sacramento who could fix him up.

His hands needed oratorical training too, for they seemed to have no earthly use except occasionally "to support his coattails."

The lecture over, Wilde was carried off to a reception at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles McCreary, where the Bric-a-Brac Club had spread its proudest creations for him to see. D. J. Simmons stayed at the church counting his losses—something like \$100.

Until after 11 o'clock, Wilde endured the paintings, the water colors of fruit, the decorated panels, the embroidered mantel covers, the hand-painted screens, the paintings on satin, the vocal duets, the piano solos, and the readings from his poems which the club members exhibited. Then he went away. Locke was around town suggesting that Mr. Wilde might return to give a matinee lecture a week hence.

## 6

Back to San Francisco, which was awaiting him, and where Platt's Hall was for the third time well filled with a fashionable and cultivated audience. Rumors were running through the crowd that a petition was being circulated asking him to lecture still again some evening during the week on the Irish poets and the Irish question. The *Call* was de-

claring, "The young poet has made a palpable hit in San Francisco," and, "It is certainly a fact that he has done better, from a managerial point of view, here than in any other city of the United States." It announced that Mr. Wilde's impressions of the city were as favorable as the city's of him.



#### CORSET AD

*A corset advertisement inserted in many newspapers and periodicals during 1882.*

regarding which he was especially informed."

In repeating his strictures against grand pianos he added that they were "dreadful in either their naked or covered condition. It will be a great era in America when, some day, a grand piano will be decorated." He sharpened his remarks on old china down to an epigram—"If you can't use it, you don't deserve it." And on the hanging of pictures he improved his directions—"They should be hung upon the eye-line. The habit in America of hanging them up near the cornice struck me as irrational at first. It was not until I saw how bad the pictures were that I realized the advantage of the custom."

As Wilde stepped upon the matinee stage at Platt's for his third lecture, the critic of the *Call* noted that "it was clearly apparent" how California's respect and hospitality had affected the visitor. Although it was his custom to wear short pants in the evening, he had put them on, this afternoon, to please his lady patrons.

"Appreciating his audience's genuine friendliness, Mr. Wilde spoke with an entire absence of effort and coldness, which had somewhat marred the delivery of his first lecture. He now adopted a more colloquial manner, and at times, in suggesting details of household decoration, his manner was such as any gentleman would adopt in speaking to a room full of acquaintances upon a subject

He rephrased his objections to modern dress and linked them now to his objections to the secondhand. In the old civilization, he said, ladies did not have so many dresses nor discard them so quickly. "They wore an elegant dress for a lifetime and then willed it into another generation."

As the lecture ended, a reporter for the *Examiner* declared that he saw a "giddy blonde aesthete of thirty, whose soul was languishing in the atmosphere of posey," bargaining with an usher to carry to Oscar "a tender missive in the old Italian style and a yellow envelope, reading—

The vierlet is for faithfulness,  
Which in me shall abide  
Hopeing likewise from your hart  
You will not let it slide."

Whether the missive reached the speaker or not, it was known that the lecture ended with Wilde apparently happier than at any other time in America. Only half price had been charged for the matinee, and the partially hostile *Examiner* had estimated the hall as half full, but Manager Locke announced that "in obedience to a numerously signed requisition," Mr. Wilde had consented to deliver a fourth lecture on April 5th, his subject being "Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century." This should prove worthwhile, predicted the *Call*, since the lecturer was the son of so distinguished and titled an Irish couple.

## 7

From the matinee lecture Wilde was led to the Bohemian Club, which, founded ten years before, was already famous even if its rooms on Pine Street were still scantier than its most energetic members planned. Writers, artists, musicians—the intellectuals of the town—gathered there, gave witty dinners to visiting celebrities, and toasted actors.

The club itself had made no effort to entertain Oscar Wilde, but a group of the younger and livelier wits, "considering him," as Jerome A. Hart reported, "a Miss Nancy," had decided to take the Englishman into camp. It had all been carefully plotted. They would start drinking before dinner, wine the guest without stint through the meal, bombard him with anecdote, egg him on, get him drunk, and have fun with him.

The game began. Soon the Americans were rolling with laughter, and as the night wore on they slumped one by one in their cups beneath the table. And still Oscar took all drinks as fast as they came and still his voice, unhurried, unceasing, went on. Out-drunk and out-

talked, San Francisco was sleeping among the table legs when Wilde looked up at the gray dawn in the windows, arose, put on his great cloak and sauntered off alone to his rooms at the Palace Hotel.

Word of the feat passed over the city during the day. Westerners who had covertly despised anyone who would wear knee pants and talk "woman-talk," suddenly realized that here was "a three-bottle man" indeed.

A committee from the Bohemian Club waited upon Wilde and asked if he would sit for a portrait. They would like to hang it in the club. One of their number, Theodore Wores, would appreciate being allowed to do it. It was a victory and Wilde knew it. He made his most gracious acceptance, and Wores fell to work. Soon after Wilde had left town the portrait was done and hung where the members could see for themselves the Aesthete who could, most fabulously, hold his liquor.

## 8

From this herculean feat in masculinity, Wilde moved to another—poker. Many who heard of this new exploit doubted if it had happened exactly as newspapers, all over the West, soon were describing it, but they agreed the legendary accounts had had some good basis in fact. The newspaper story was that Wilde and Locke had driven on Monday, April 3rd, to the Cliff House, that famous roadhouse seven miles from the city, where guests sat overlooking the sea. On rocks below, seals swarmed, coughed, and dove. For a time Wilde had stood on the balcony "in a stained glass attitude, lost in contemplation of the waves breaking on the cliffs."

"How grand the roar of the ocean," he said dreamily to a certain Captain Foster and Ned Fry, natives who sat near by.

Slowly the visitor and the old residents fell into conversation. They invited him to the bar and, eventually, to a game of "dollar ante."

"What is dollar ante?" said Oscar, drearily, in mezzo soprano high."

They explained and "gave him a seat and chuckled way down in their bronchial tubes."

"A great sadness fell upon him. Sometimes an unutterable melancholy would, with dark, shadow his dreaming eyes, but he said little—only sighed."

At first nobody got very far. "By and by it was Oscar's deal, and he caressed the cards gently and distributed them mournfully, like crumbs at communion. Everybody went in. The captain took two cards; Fry took one and Oscar one."

The captain bet five dollars and Fry raised him five. Oscar murmured dubiously, but put up his portion.

"Ten harder," said the captain.

"Ten more than you," remarked Fry.

Oscar Wilde knit his brow and said, "The o'ershadowing sky is murky, but I must stay. I will—how do you phrase it, call? I will call on you."

The captain joined the merry throng. He laid down his cards with a smile of triumph.

"Three aces," said he.

"Full hand," said Fry proudly and reached for the money.

"Too-too," the poet murmured, and laid down four deuces.

As he arose, he drawled, "Now that I remember it, gentlemen, we used to indulge in this little recreation at Oxford. Come and take a snifter with me."

However exaggerated the tale of this gaming feat might be, it went speedily to join the tales of his having drunk under the table the best guzzlers of New York and San Francisco.

## 9

On the way to and from the Cliff House, Wilde saw more of a thing that offended him in America—outdoor advertising. On boards and rocks against the majestic view of the Pacific Ocean were glaring such signs as W. G. Marshall, that other British traveler, had recently noted, "Vinegar Bitters Is All the Go for Love," "Condensed Eggs, Better than Fresh," "Chew Jackson's Best Plug," "Yosemite Bitters Are Good for Belly Ache," "Pacific Stomach Bitters Beats Them All, Try Them."

Van Schaack & Co. Sell White Shirts

Van Schaack & Co. Cure Bunions

Van Schaack & Co. Are Bully

Van Schaack & Co. Don't Practice Law

Van Schaack & Co. Won't Cheat You

Ye Gods! What Bargains at Van Schaack & Co.

Wilde had noted these glaring examples of bad taste in other parts of the country, even at Niagara. "Sapolio," "Harvey's Horse Powder," "Smoke Vanity Fair," "Chew Wood Tag Navy," "Rising Sun Stove Polish," "Tarrant Seltzer Aperient Cures Diarrhea," had assaulted his eye from train windows in the East. Near Chicago, blank walls and rocks had screamed the news that "Bixby's Is the Best Blacking,"

"Wizard Oil Is Good for Neuralgia," "Use Gail and Ax' Scotch Snuff," "Eat Gunther's Candy and Be Happy," "Use Dr. King's New Discovery for Consumption, Colds and Coughs."

**DR. SCOTT'S**  
**Electric Corset.**

A REMARKABLE INVENTION!

Will be sent by mail, postpaid, on trial to any lady sending us \$3 and 10 cents for registration, which will be returned if not as represented; or can be had through all drygoods and fancy stores.

The Pall Mall Electric Ass'n,  
842 BROADWAY, New York.  
State Waist Measurement, and mention  
this paper.

Send for circulars of our Dr. Scott's  
External Hair and Fleath Remedy.

### A CRAZE IN 1882

*One of the many "electric" corsets advertised in American newspapers and periodicals in 1882.*

of the salesman and the advertiser might be his own, but his voice was the old voice of the preacher, wooing the reluctant and the uninformed to a reputedly better way of life.

Advertising in newspapers had grown prodigiously since the 1860's, vending the products of what everybody called "The Age of Invention." Here and there, shrewd observers were saying that it was beginning to change the character of newspapers. Some critics said editors, fearful of

Advertising as a business had risen along with industry and salesmanship since the Civil War. It was part of the new aggressiveness that had been unleashed upon the quiet, pastoral civilization of America. The spirit of coercion, of reform, of propagandized drives for change had begun to appear in secular matters as far back as the 1830's when William Lloyd Garrison and Benjamin Lundy had begun lonely campaigns for abolition. It had its roots in the Puritan religious culture of New England, the restless urge for revivalism, for evangelism, for bringing the world, by sheer moral persuasion and intimidation, to the preacher's belief. As the organized churches, equivocating or evading on the slavery issue, lost their great driving force, and settled into static self-satisfaction, their spirit had gone into the abolitionists and the Woman's Rights Reformers, who might break with churches, but who represented the Puritan idea just the same. The spirit, after the war, had gone into the world of business, and now gave point and direction to the marketing of industry's creations.

Chicago, which was leading in the new business of merchandizing, was itself a "Yankee" town set in the rural West where its tradesman energy had been for years at war with the quiet handicraft civilization of Mississippi Valley farm lands. Chicago, so soon after the revolution of the 1860's, had invented "the drummer"—the traveling salesman who coaxed, bullied, shamed, enticed the farmers to buy the products of factories. The face

offending advertisers, were commencing to write less violently and scathingly about people they didn't like and to be more decent about personalities. Other critics said editors were growing more commercial; still others, that they were growing more independent of selfish political interests which had always dominated them. Nobody was sure exactly what the new volume of advertising would do to newspapers.

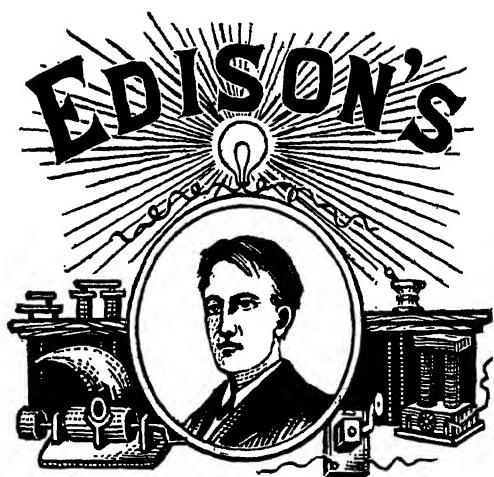
Visitors from England had been, for years, amazed at the number and circulations of American papers. David McCrae in 1870 had counted more in the State of New York, alone, than in the whole British Isles. In 1880, the United States had had 971 dailies with an aggregate circulation of over 3,500,000, while its 8,633 weeklies, 133 semi-weeklies, 73 tri-weeklies, and 1,167 monthlies had a total circulation of 28,213,291.

Newspapers were prospering with advertisements which professed to utilize the mysterious properties of electricity in adding healthfulness, beauty, sexual attractiveness and potentialities to mankind. A portrait of Thomas A. Edison of Menlo Park, New Jersey, looked out from the pages of an advertisement in *The Youth's Companion*, adding conviction to the bold claim that his electrical device, "Edison's Polyform," would "cure rheumatism, neuralgia, sciatica and all nervous pains." Edson's (a word easily confused by the hasty reader with the wizard's name) Magnetic Garter was declaring that it would mold the female leg "into perfect form and add marvelous grace to the step." Electric hair brushes were proclaiming their readiness to lend romantic beauty to tresses as well as to conquer dandruff and baldness. Richardson's "Magneto-Galvanic Battery," an electric lavaliere, had been advertised to the readers of *Leslie's* as "A wonderful Discovery," and its sponsors advised, "Throw away drugs! Try Nature's Remedy. It cures neuralgia, kidney disease, torpid liver, impure blood. Do you feel blue? Has excess injured your health? Have you weakness of mind or body? Try Richardson's."

Electric corsets, filled by the white full bosoms of energetic females, were many, the legends beneath them shouting such messages as:

"Wilson's Magnetic Corsets help general disability, sleeplessness, nervousness, indigestion, rheumatism and paralysis; Wilsonia Magnetic Appliances cure ninety per cent of 100 cases of Catarrh, Dyspepsia, diseases of the Liver and Kidneys, Piles, Locomotor Ataxia, Gout, Chronic Diarrhea. Every person out of health is deficient in magnetism. Cure without medicine. No cure, no pay."

Or, "Dr. Scott's Electric Corset, this beautiful invention is created by the happy thought of Dr. Scott of London, who has adapted electromagnetism to ladies' corsets, thus bringing the wonderful curative



# **POLYFORM**

**CURES**

## **RHEUMATISM, NEURALGIA, SCIATICA,**

**And all Nervous Pains.**

**PREPARED BY THE  
Menlo Park Manufacturing Co., New York  
PRICE, \$1.00—SOLD BY ALL DRUGGISTS.**

**EDISON'S CURE**

*Thomas A. Edison's venture into the field of "electrical cures." An advertisement in "The Youth's Companion," November 10, 1881.*

agency within the reach of every lady. It will ward off disease, improve the elegance of her figure, make the muscles and tissues more plastic and yielding and mold the figure to any desired form without tight lacing. \$3."

*The Youth's Companion* was an Elysian field for corset advertisers—even the non-magnetic brands being displayed, for young eyes, with bare-armed and charmingly bosomed ladies inside. One, "Warner Brothers' Coraline" held no model inside its fortified stockade, but was occupied instead of a Cupid who peeped out over its swelling ramparts to ogle a human infant who, from below, brandished a wineglass in salutation.

The magazine had, within the past year, become more popular with adults than with children, largely as the result of J. T. Trowbridge's serial story, *The Pocket Rifle*. So avidly were the installments of this story awaited that farm work often came to a standstill on the day the latest issue was out, horses were unhitched from implements and ridden by boys to the post office so that the progress of the characters might be read aloud to the open-mouthed family and its fringe of hired men and hired girls.

Electric belts were urged upon men as restorers of health and virility, and credulous middle-aged purchasers were coursing the streets wondering if ladies in general were observing the new glint in their eyes. Equally trusting males were perspiring virtuously in a marvelous new invention—underclothes made of buckskin which had been lightly perforated in the hope of not smothering the wearer entirely while it kept him safe from prospective pneumonia.

## II

### JESSE, BY JEHOVAH!

WHEN his Saturday matinee lecture was ended, Wilde gave himself over to the longest period of relaxation he had known since arriving in America. Not before Wednesday night would he need to do again what he did so badly, lecture in public, and until then he was free to do what of all things he did best, talk in private.

He could talk without interruption while sitting for Wores, while attending the receptions which San Franciscans gave him, while visit-

ing the city's School of Design or while driving with assorted hosts. To seal officially his capture of the city came a dinner at the dignified Union Club.

America now seemed to be at once more like England, and like Paris, and like the America he had expected to find. The San Francisco countryside was green and suave as at home, mists rolling in from the sea. Here, as in most parts of the mountainous West, there was something Parisian in the people's indifference toward nonconformity in dress.

It was a tolerance that had always lived on the American border. It had thrived among the pioneers as they pushed the boundary of civilization across Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and it had lived on the plains where cowboys thought it bad form to notice eccentricity in clothes, haircut or manners. They might have tipsy sport with tenderfeet now and then, but their prevailing code forbade asking a stranger where he came from or where he was going. Personal questions were dangerous in a region to which men had come to start life anew. Also there was indifference to "family" or previous social position in a land where everything depended upon an immigrant's individual efforts.

Something of the religious tolerance which had blessed the midlands in the 1820's and '30's, lay now on the cow-country and the mining gulches. Only in long-settled sections of the plains where New England colonies had been strong—as in Kansas—was there active desire to reform habits and morals.

California, although one of the earliest settled portions of the United States, was new to the American civilization. Thirty years earlier it had held less than 100,000 people. Now it held more than 870,000. "All its towns are saints," ran a popular saying, "and all its people sinners."

Experts making up the 1880 census for the whole nation, found that in the cities and larger towns of California, only one in twenty adults was a native of the State. They came to the conclusion that "the people as a class are unequaled in their general intelligence and enterprise. The journey in pioneer times was in itself sufficient to educate a man; and, after his arrival, he found himself among a mixed population which had to make allowances for strange customs and in new conditions which required new modes of working and new habits of life. The migratory habits of the miners, the large profits of the business, and the small proportion of women (there were 6.6 women to every 10 men in 1880) have all exercised a strong influence on California society,

which, even among the poorest and most ignorant class, has a liberal and cosmopolitan tone."

They noted that a newcomer had only to live in California for fifteen years before "he carries his pride so far that it is observed as something exceptional in the United States."

Wilde might have found, in the conclusion of these authorities, explanation of much that delighted him. "It is perhaps partly on account of their State pride that the Californians are cordial and hospitable. They want travelers to carry away good impressions of the country. The enjoyment of life is a prominent purpose of California society; while religion, social display, and the accumulation of money are less noticeable than in most other countries. The prevalent mode of living is luxurious; and the habits are expensive. In no place is society more free and cordial and ready to give a friendly reception to a stranger than in California. In no part of the world is the individual more free from restraint. High wages, migratory habits and bachelor life are not favorable to the maintenance of stiff moral rules among men.

"Life in California is very public. Many of the people live in hotels and at large boarding houses. Travelers are numerous; theaters and balls are abundant and well attended; the population is excitable; all take the newspapers; money is abundant and easily earned and of course spent freely, and the favorable method of spending it is in public festivals and attending places of amusement."

English gentlemen had, for almost twenty years, been drawn to the Far West to invest in mines or large cattle ranches. The adventurous quality of the region, its talk of Indians and gunplay, had interested Londoners, and now, as if some dramatist were arranging matters for Oscar Wilde, the San Francisco newspapers on the morning of April 4th announced the murder of the most famous outlaw of the West—Jesse James.

## 2

The *Gazette* in St. Joseph, Missouri, that morning had screamed in its headlines, "JESSE, BY JEHOVAH." The *Kansas City Journal* had cried, "GOOD-BY, JESSE"; the *Denver News* shrieked, "JESSE'S JUDAS," and all the newspapers in the United States were exploding with an excitement scarcely less restrained.

The notorious bandit, who had defied capture for almost sixteen years, had at last met his fate and now lay dead in St. Joe with his boots on.

Newspaper readers from coast to coast said they couldn't believe it. Many of them, perhaps most of them, didn't want to believe it, for the

man had, at the age of thirty-five, become a legend. To masses of Americans he had become a hero, a good-humored Robin Hood by reputation, a man who reputedly took from the rich and gave to the poor.

The newspapers and pulpits had for a decade called him "Missouri's shame," or "America's shame"—a bandit whom all the law forces of the land could not stop. But the thing that the forces of respectability and capitalism singled out as his greatest sin—the invention and practice of train robbery—had not seemed so bad to farmers and laborers.

Jesse James, riding with his brother Frank, and their friends, the three Younger boys, and a few other kindred spirits, had instituted the crime of the train hold-up on July 21, 1873, and since then had perfected their art, varying it frequently with the looting of banks. Their first train robbery, at Adair, Iowa, had come at the very start of the financial panic, and their career had paralleled that of the hard times, railroad strikes, farmer-and-laborer revolt against conditions which had favored the rich. The farmers, who charged railroads with cheating all those who shipped grain and live stock, and the workmen, burning railroad cars because capitalists overworked and underpaid them, could not be expected to hate Jesse James because he robbed railroads; neither could the small investor who had lost heavily through the shameless stock-jugglery by railway magnates. And with banks failing on all sides through this period of panic, ruined depositors were apt to hope Jesse James would never be caught for the crime of thrusting a Colt into a cashier's face and spurring away with currency in a Missouri meal-bag.

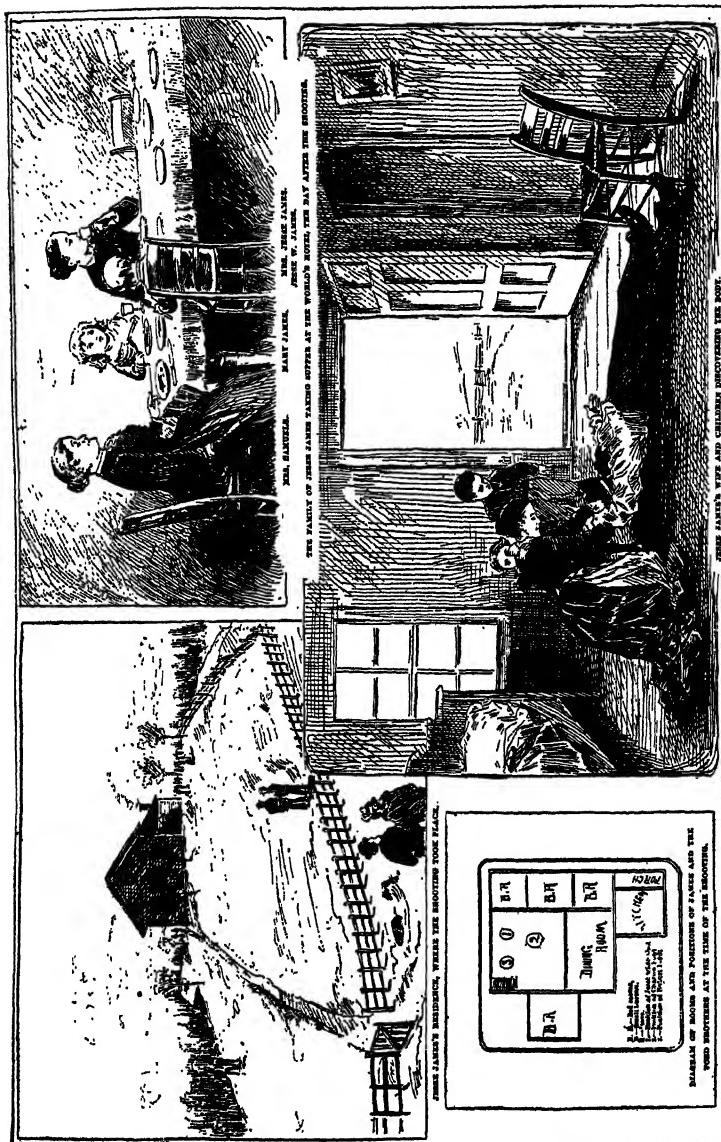
In contrast with the popular understanding that they had, by 1882, taken over \$250,000 from banks and railways, the James boys were reputed never to loot a farmer or a workingman, and to occasionally repay in cash any plebeian whose horse they had been forced to appropriate during flight from the law.

Another item in the catalogue of excuses which the American masses had made for these outlaws was their service as boys in the Confederate cavalry. Frank James at eighteen, and Jesse at sixteen, had enlisted in bands of agrarian guerillas who had harried Missouri and the Kansas line. In the lawless warfare, which had devastated the border, they had learned that loot was expected of them, and that two Colt revolvers were the ideal armament for a horseman. When the war ended, they found it impossible to return to the dull round of farm life in their home, Clay County, Missouri. Then, too, their war-time enemies, the pro-Union Missourians, now had the law on their side, and, fortified with deputy-sheriff and militia commissions, had sought revenge.

Partly from persecution and partly from war-acquired appetite for violence, the James boys and the Youngers had merely kept on riding

## MURDER OF JESSE JAMES

"The Murder of Jesse James, the Bandit, at St. Joseph, Mo. From sketches by our Special Artist."  
"Daily Graphic," New York, April 12, 1882.



and robbing when the war was done. Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kentucky, had felt their depredations, but mostly Missouri had suffered. Protected, sheltered, warned and often horsed by farmers who knew and liked them, they had no difficulty in mystifying their pursuers who each year grew thicker and thicker, including an army of Pinkerton detectives, sheriffs, and constables, while the police forces of all Western cities kept vigilant watch for them.

Public sympathy had increased after January, 1875, when a band of Pinkerton detectives, hunting Jesse, set fire to the James homestead and blew off his mother's forearm with a hand grenade tossed in at a window. This act, generally frowned upon, was the subject for strong denunciation among laborers who hated the Pinkertons for their service as armed guards for industrial plants and breakers of strikes.

Hero-tales of Jesse's charity and kindliness had been common, one of the most generally circulated being the story of how he had loaned \$1,400 to a poor widow a few minutes before her skinflint landlord arrived to foreclose the mortgage on her home, and how, when she had the signed receipt, he had waylaid the departing landlord and recovered his \$1,400. Much was made of the fact that Jesse never used tobacco, liquor, or prostitutes, and that both he and his brother Frank had found time, amid the unrelenting man-hunt that followed them, to marry home-neighborhood girls and rear quiet, orderly families. Under the alias Thomas Howard, Jesse had, at brief times, operated legitimate businesses in various locales, and had in each case been known as honest.

## 3

Only one serious defeat had the James boys known in their sixteen years of crime. While robbing a bank at Northfield, Minnesota, on September 7, 1876, they had been besieged by townsfolk who killed two of the band, wounded one of the Youngers and, pursuing with a ferocity they had learned in Indian-fighting, had killed still another robber and captured all three of the Youngers. Jesse and Frank had escaped, not to revive in full power until 1879 when they robbed the Glendale train so spectacularly as to have folksongs written about it. Through 1880 Jesse had raided trains and banks with such rapacity that even some of his farmer champions had begun to turn against him. It was realized that he had been hypocritical in boasting that he never robbed Southern people and was still fighting against the North as he had during the Civil War. Missouri, checking up his crimes, found that the majority had been committed in its borders—his native State. Not





#### THE BODY OF JESSE JAMES

At the left is an engraving from the photograph of Jesse James's corpse made by Alex. Lozo in St. Joseph soon after the murderer. "Daily Graphic," New York, April 11, 1882. At the right is the Lozo photograph as worked over by the pen-and-ink experts of "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper" and published by that newspaper on April 22 without acknowledgment of the deception.



only had he robbed the plain people as passengers, but he had killed several conductors and train workmen.

To add to the mood of change, came the realization that the long financial panic was over. Times were better. Bankers and railroads seemed not quite so hateful—and Jesse not quite so heroic.

A youth, William Wallace, was elected prosecutor in Jackson County on the platform of law enforcement and, specifically, the avowed intention of stopping Jesse James. The new broom swept clean, bringing minor members of the outlaw band to justice and driving Jesse into hiding. However Jesse, as Thomas Howard, had run no farther than Kansas City, where, for months, he had lived under the nose of the law until in November, 1881, he had moved up the river a few miles to St. Joseph, Missouri.

With him and his family in a small white house with green shutters, lived two new members of his band, Charles Ford, who had joined during the Fall of 1881, and Charley's brother Bob, who had come in the last week of March, 1882. So quietly did Jesse conduct himself in the city that no one had suspected this gentle, blue-eyed, softly bearded citizen of being the outlaw for whose arrest and conviction the governor of Missouri was offering \$10,000.

After breakfast on April 3, 1882, Jesse had walked into the sitting-room where the Ford brothers were rocking, had talked about how hot the day was going to be, had taken off his coat, then had added, "I guess I'll take off my pistols, for fear somebody will see them if I walk in the yard."

Unbuckling his belt with two guns dangling, he laid it upon the bed with his hat and coat, picked up a brush, stepped onto a chair and started to dust the photograph of a horse he loved.

Silently the Ford brothers rose and drew their revolvers. It was the first time in a week of waiting that they had caught their leader without his guns or with his back turned. Bob Ford was the quicker of the two and shot Jesse through the back of the head.

Jesse swayed, then fell full on the carpet.

The Ford brothers with their guns in their hands ran out into the yard and were straddling a fence when Mrs. James, having first dashed to her husband's body, thrust her head out of the door crying, "Robert, you have done this; come back!"

"I swear to God I didn't do it," Bob called, but he came back, followed by his brother. They grouped around the dying man, Mrs. James trying to stop the blood as it ebbed from a hole in the forehead. Charley Ford said Bob's revolver had gone off accidentally.

"Yes," snapped Mrs. James; "I guess it went off on purpose."

A crowd collected, refusing for a time to believe that the dead Mr. Howard could be the great Jesse James. Even after Jesse's mother had been brought and, raising the stump of her forearm, had sworn that the dead man was her son, the truth was hard to believe. While the newspapers all over America bore first-page announcement that the sixteen-year man hunt had ended, old friends of Jesse across Missouri refused to believe it. Major John M. Edwards, Confederate veteran, journalist, and chief glorifier of the James boys in print, asked, "Do you suppose if it had been Jesse, Mrs. James wouldn't have got away with at least one of the Fords?"

Many men who had, in the past, known the outlaw, joined the doubting chorus when *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* appeared with his engraved portrait made from a photograph taken in St. Joseph. That he should have deliberately sat for a picture which thousands of police were crying for, was unthinkable. Also the eyes were not like Jesse's.

Soon other newspapers, however, cleared up this matter, publishing engravings which proved that *Leslie's* artist had merely worked over a bona fide photograph of the corpse—a picture made by a St. Joe photographer while Jesse lay upon the cooling-board in the undertaker's.

Immediately, as newspaper correspondents telegraphed the news of the bandit's sensational murder, all the old sympathy for Jesse—and a new flood as well—arose in force, even respectable journals and citizens denouncing Missouri's governor, Thomas T. Crittenden, for having conspired with the traitorous Ford brothers to assassinate the man whom the law had failed to arrest.

Jesse James was passing into American folk-lore as a martyr, and almost before he was cold in his grave, ballad makers in the hills of Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas were making songs to him.

Something similar was happening at the time in the Southwest, where it was being said that the greatest outlaw of that section, William H. Bonney, "Billy the Kid," was not dead, as had been given out. This desperado, reputed to have killed twenty-one men in his twenty-one years, had been shot from ambush by Sheriff Pat Garrett at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, on July 15, 1881, and, in April, 1882, Garrett was writing Billy's life, while several of the dead outlaw's skulls were, being exhibited at carnivals and county fairs.

Credulous tales of survival after death were common in the West and South in 1882. In Enid, Oklahoma, a drunken house-painter, David E. George, was believed by many to be John Wilkes Booth, who

after murdering Abraham Lincoln, had fantastically escaped, leaving an innocent man to be shot down in his place.

And for a month newspapers across the country had been printing the revelations of Omaha jailbirds to the effect that Brigham Young, leader of the Mormons, had not died as reported in 1877, but was alive in some secret place, guiding his people in their new difficulties with the United States Government. Some Mormons believed that he had died, but had been resurrected. Outside Utah, skeptics maintained that Brigham had promised resurrection in order to strengthen his policies and successors. At the time of his death wild rumors of his suicide in order to escape Government prosecution had been common and, in early March, 1882, the inmate of an Omaha jail told newspaper reporters that he had recently helped steal Young's body from its grave in Salt Lake City, and on taking it to "a Missouri River town," had disclosed the body to persons who had known Brigham and who said that the corpse was not his. Examining the corpse, the ghouls decided that incisions in its feet meant that another man had been slain by poison and substituted for the leader who must be still alive.

Tales of grave-robbers were coursing the country in 1882. Most State laws forbade the purchase of cadavers by medical schools and there was a lively trade between "body-snatchers" and professors of surgery. The mother of Jesse James was racked by fear that enterprising showmen would dig up her son's body and exhibit it across the country as they wished to do with the body of the doomed Charles Guiteau.

Tales of superstition were almost as common in the America through which Wilde was passing as they were in his native Ireland. In only one department was the West lacking; it had strangely few ghost stories. On the great open plains and in its sunburned cities, ghosts did not walk as they walked back in the dark woods and swamps of the East and South. In the clear air of the treeless plains, the banshees and the elves were not creditable. The West might believe preposterous things about dead men, but if the dead were resurrected they had simply escaped death, that was all; there were no ghosts.

Oscar Wilde's lecture on the poets of Ireland was to be his fifth in San Francisco or its suburbs within ten days, and the audience, when assembled on the night of April 5th, was thought to be, by the friendly *Call*, "only fair" in size. Still, it was warm enough, and applauded often as the lecturer discussed Celtic bards past and present.

He thought John Francis Waller's "Little Nell" a perfect treasure and quoted it in full. He stirred the Irish patriots by tributes to Daniel O'Connell and read from that leader's poem, "Feelings of an Irish Exile." He seemed to the *Call* critic "extremely graceful in speaking

of his mother's poems, criticism being disarmed in the presence of love," and when he had finished reading one of her longest works "with much effect and feeling," heavy applause shook Platt's Hall and a young lady rushed up with "a fragrant bouquet of violets, whereat the audience again applauded and Oscar smiled and bowed his thanks."

## 4

As Wilde quit San Francisco for the two-day train ride to Salt Lake City, where he was due to arrive on the morning of April 10th, San Francisco was still chattering his phrases—or what satirists had popularized as his phrases. "Do you yearn?" people asked each other, and laughed.

Observing the scene was a correspondent of the *Herald*, chief voice of the Mormons in Salt Lake City. He wrote his editor that everything in San Francisco was running to sunflowers. "It is too utter to see the silliness exhibited. Milliner's windows are decked with sunflowers; sunflower buttonhole bouquets are worn; sunflower fans are fashionable in the theaters. The rage is too-too. If one asks another early in the afternoon what time it is, the reply is, 'Two to two.'

"Young ladies when asked their age say they are not quite two-two; employers when vexed by their employees tell them to go to to. Articles of dress are labeled 'Too exquisitely too too, too utterly utter, too sweetly sweet.' Even the locomotives have caught the fever and 'too-too.' Oscar's twaddle has realized for him two too-good houses; his third one was thin, but he has raked in enough to make him feel happy as a big sunflower, and as that's his regular business, I suppose is O.K."

If the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was not welcoming Oscar Wilde, he was the only Britisher denied hospitality, for the Isles had furnished so many converts to the Mormon faith that it was sometimes said that "one-half the Mormons are British-born."

From Glasgow and Liverpool 1,800 immigrants had arrived in 1880 and the number would not be less in 1882, it was being reported. The Scotch, Welsh, and English had not, however, been accompanied by any corresponding number of the Irish. *The Independent* had declared on February 16th, "No Roman Catholic has ever been brought into the Mormon fold." It had been from the Baptist and Wesleyan churches in Great Britain and from the Lutheran Church in Scandinavia that the Mormons had wooed most of their converts. More than four hundred Mormon missionaries were working in Europe, with Liverpool as their central office, and their promises of prosperity and polygamy were falling on open ears. Sixty missionaries were proselyting among Baptists

and Methodists of the Southern States of the Union with similar success. "Perverts" was the epithet Gentile newspapers loosely and blandly applied to these Mormon converts as they went westward—perverts from Christianity: a charge that ignored the claims of the Saints to the most puritanic Christian orthodoxy.

The Mormons were growing so rapidly in numbers and power that in 1882 a great moral and political crusade was being preached against them.

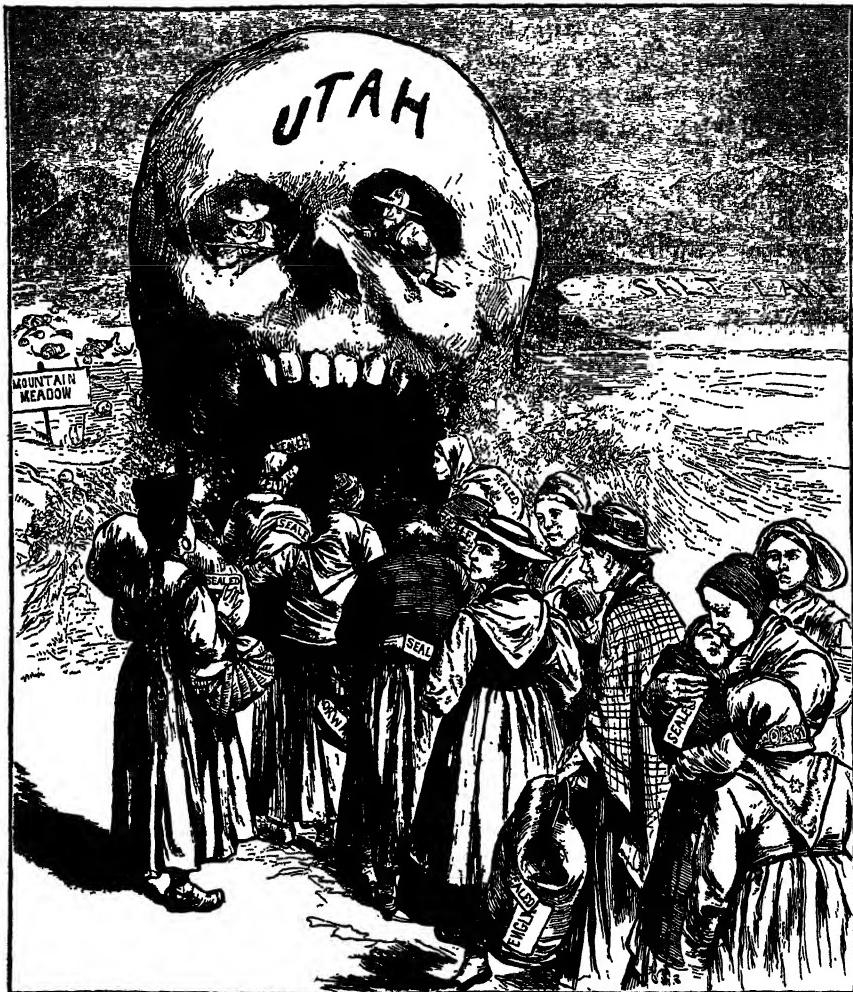
There was, to some observers, irony in this crusade, for Vermont-born Brigham Young, in launching the Mormon settlement of Utah in 1847, had been attempting only another form of the communistic experiments in colonization of which Brook Farm had been so famous an example. In all save one or two of his principles he had been a Puritan of the Puritans, allowing no saloons, no brothels, no gaming houses, no idleness, and enforcing the most orthodox attendance upon religion and the paying of church tithes. Hard work and frugality of the strictest sort had been practiced from the first moment the Mormons' wagon wheels had rolled down into the valley of Great Salt Lake.

But to the reformers of the dominant Northern civilization, Mormons were wicked people because they were polygamists. The uproar against this "adulterous and savage" custom had been growing louder during the past year, for the territory of Utah was pressing for statehood. Brigham Young was said to have had nineteen wives, and the modest number of marriages by the average Mormon had been swelled by the legend-makers to five or sometimes eight.

East of the Rocky Mountains, clergymen found denunciation of Mormons an easy way of bringing sensation-hungry crowds to church. Lecturers learned that they could, in describing Mormon horrors, discuss sex with an impunity denied when they talked on more conventional subjects. Prudish subscribers did not object when family newspapers reported in detail the "carnal orgies" of mountain polygamists.

Millions of Americans, who delighted to read of the free gun-play and cowboy killings on the lawless border, had grown suddenly horrified when six-shooters had barked in Utah. All shootings between stockmen in that Territory had been put down to murderous plots by Mormons. Unfortunately for the Mormons, evidence was strong that some of them had massacred Gentile immigrants at Mountain Meadows. Brigham Young had also become involved in something regarded as rebellion by the Government, shortly before the Civil War, and although the United States Army had not been resisted when it went to Utah, it had been forced to go there, and Northern agitators had been able to link

Mormons and Southern Secessionists together and simultaneously denounce polygamy and slavery as the great moral evils of the day.



#### MORMONISM CARTOONED

*"The Cave of Despair."* *"Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,"* February 4, 1882.

During the second week in March the United States Senate had adopted the House's Anti-Polygamy bill without amendment; for the first time there was a law with anti-Mormon teeth in it. Once before, in 1862, a bill against the Mormons had been passed, but it had not been

enforced. The new bill made polygamy or bigamy a misdemeanor, punishable by fine or imprisonment, and forbade those so convicted to either vote or hold office. To control Utah territorial elections in a population of whose 144,000 more than 100,000 were Mormons, the bill abolished local officers and substituted a commission of five to be appointed by the President of the United States.

"Further legislation is necessary," said *The Independent* on March 23rd, "to extirpate the polygamous cancer from the body politic of Utah," although it admitted that the bill had gone far by specifying that it was only necessary to prove unlawful cohabitation, not the actual rite of plural marriage.

Only a few voices were brave enough to protest when Congress expelled Utah's Congressional delegate, George Q. Cannon, because he had four wives.

An Eastern Gentile dominie, the Reverend Timothy Hay, writing in *The Independent* of February 16, 1882, had denounced Congress for "contemptible hypocrisy" in expelling Cannon without sending with him several Gentile congressmen who were openly adulterous. "The great crime is not in having many paramours, but in marrying them," he said. "A man may keep as many mistresses as he pleases, provided that he acknowledges he is prompted by his own vile lusts and the temptations of the devil. It is only when he claims to be acting conscientiously that his punishment is called for."

Propaganda, which declared that the Mormon hierarchy "kept the people in the thralldom of ignorance," that Utah schools were "deplorable" and the Territory's whole educational system was "a mockery and a sham," kept many liberal Easterners from defending the Saints. Reformers who were working for more liberal divorce laws, for increased freedom of thought, for woman's emancipation, even for free love, could not find themselves defending any system which reputedly ran so counter to their own reliance upon the printing press. It was dangerous to suggest that schools in Utah were no worse than in any other desert or mountain region of the West. And it was unfashionable to believe what United States census officials had decided—"much attention has been paid by the Mormon priesthood to education."

No politicians outside Utah dared mention the original principles of religious freedom which Jefferson had written into the Declaration of Independence and upon which the nation had been founded; nor to point out that the Mormons, by attempting to produce all they consumed, and to live the life of a self-sufficient agrarian community, were only practicing the Jeffersonian system which had been so successful before the mid-century industrial revolution. The Mormons were in

trouble not so much because they challenged old American ideas as because they defied new ones. Their handicraft civilization was successful enough to slap industrialism across the face. Eastern financiers, eager to exploit the West, saw plainly enough that this agrarian stronghold must be stormed.

The Mormon Church discouraged excess railroads just when magnates were griddling the face of the country with lines which were more profitable as financial footballs than as public utilities. It frowned on mines, on factories, and upon the whole wage system. Its members paid tithes of ten per cent to the Church and no interest to New York bankers.

Worst of all the Church was growing out beyond Utah's borders into neighboring Territories. In November, 1881, the Governor of Idaho had shocked the East by admitting that in his Territory the Saints held the balance of power and would soon control everything. True, Brigham Young's idea of an agrarian, handicraft Utopia had been injured somewhat by the inrush of Gentile miners in 1849—two years after he had arrived with his flock in the Land of Deseret—but it was still so strong and bold that it must be destroyed if the industrialists were to win the West.

It was time for the enemies of the Saints to strike. Andrew Carnegie had begun in the late Seventies to import cheap European labor into his steel mills, and this whole industry, rising so rapidly in the midlands, was seeing his wisdom. To owners of large factories it was nothing but wicked heresy for Mormon missionaries to go about Europe, as they did, telling ignorant peasants that American industry would exploit them, make them live in slums, while happiness, dignity, and freedom awaited them among the wide acres of Zion.

Eastern capitalists could be pleased when they read strictures against polygamy in the reports of experts who digested the census returns of 1880, but there was menace in what those experts went on to say:

"Communism in business matters is a common feature among the Mormons. Most of the wholesale and retail trade is monopolized by the Zion Coöperative Mercantile Institution"—chains of stores at which the members traded. "There are also many coöperative irrigation, farming, and dairying companies. Each little hamlet is almost entirely self-supporting and has little to export."

Spokesmen of the industrialists cried, "The Church forces its own monopoly upon the ignorant people." The leaders of Zion answered that it was universally admitted that their people were exceedingly shrewd and thrifty, and that these same people had found they could



MRS. JESSE JAMES AND ARMORY OF THE  
BORDER OUTLAW

*Photograph by Chas. Eisenmann; loaned by Gertrude Stein.*



trade more profitably at the company stores. Unable to deny the logic of this, the critics fell back upon the surer ground—"Polygamy must go!"

## 5

As Wilde approached Salt Lake City, the newspapers began lecturing their readers on the necessity for showing how superior to Easterners they were in breeding. The boorishness of Boston toward Wilde was sharply recalled. The *Tribune* said on April 9th, "As a gentleman, he is entitled to respect. . . . It is an excellent policy never to laugh at a man who knows more than yourself." And the *Herald*, while still hostile enough to predict "curiosity will draw a full house, if reason will not," informed its readers that "those who go expecting to see a person intellectually their inferior will be seriously disappointed."

"The Theatre" as the city's large and well-equipped playhouse was called, was sold out for the poet's lecture a day before he arrived. Brigham Young had fostered the drama, and the city had given a prosperous engagement to the Melville Troupe's *Patience* some months earlier, as indeed it gave to almost all of the many theatrical companies that visited it.

At noon, on Monday, April 10th, a large crowd blackened the steps of the Walker Hotel. A hack drove up from the railroad station. A Negro servant alighted, then came a small man, Locke, then "a tall man swathed in a cloak." "That's Oscar," said everybody. Out rushed the hotel manager, followed by a bellboy wearing a sunflower in his button-hole, and looking quite ill at ease.

They all vanished by way of the ladies' entrance. The barkeeper was disappointed, for he had a sunflower "hoisted behind the bar." Ladies at dining-room tables sat with lilies in their hair, eyeing the door, until word came down that Oscar would eat in his room.

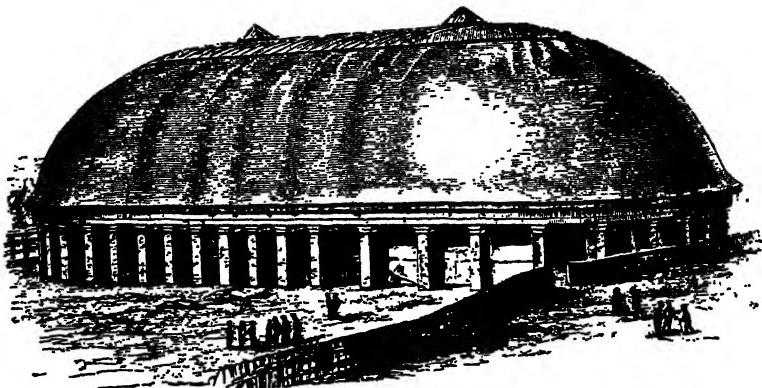
Into that sanctum soon came a reporter from the *Herald*, asking how the Aesthete liked America. With what the reporter thought, as he took down stenographic notes, was "the utmost candor," Wilde began to talk:

"No part of America has struck me so favorably as California, although I have yet to see Colorado. I intend to return to San Francisco and the West Coast next year with a party of friends in the capacity of a private gentleman traveling for his own amusement and not as a public lecturer condemned to go on the platform at every place I stop."

The newsman heard Wilde "speak very contentedly" of the financial results of his tour, and to propose spending some of the money on a leisurely study of Italy, including a long stay in Venice.

"I am more and more astonished and pleased every time I lecture at the courtesy with which I am received by audiences. Everybody, they say, laughs at me, and says I am a fraud, yet not only do they fill any place I choose to lecture in, but they sit out all I have to say with surprising good humor and patience."

He thought it quite possible that within a year all England would dress as he did, particularly since "the Prince of Wales and some of his friends have already pronounced in favor of the velvet coat, ruffles, knee breeches and silk hose.



THE MORMON TABERNACLE

*"It has the shape of a soup-kettle," said Oscar Wilde. Reproduced from "Through America" by W. G. Marshall, London, 1882.*

"But another reason for my wearing this costume is based on a principle, for live poets have principles, and that is that one should do as one preaches. Now William Morris, the author of that exquisite *Earthly Paradise*, is prophetically proclaiming the doctrine of artistic dress as a preliminary to a revival of true art; but he goes about himself in the very shabbiest and ugliest of nineteenth century clothes."

To his listeners Wilde revealed that he carried his famous fur robe about with him to hide the hideous sofas that awaited him in all hotel rooms.

He talked of American poets, praised Joaquin Miller and Walt Whitman, and said the thing he had been thinking about Longfellow during the past two weeks, the epigram about the man having been himself a beautiful poem, more beautiful than anything he ever wrote.

"Emerson's prose," said Wilde, "I consider poetry, and the poetry of some other Americans I consider prose. We rhymsters are without number, the real poet has not come once in a century."

The interview ended on a note that won the reporter as he copied it down—"Among the personal friends I have made in America, there are many who have exacted the promise that I return next year. And so I will when I have got more to say and learnt a better style of saying it."

## 6

For days the young ladies of Salt Lake City had been planning social events to which the lion could be enticed, but as the *Herald* observed next day, "Fortunately they were abandoned and he has come and gone unmolested. He saw as much and was seen as little as he could manage." What had happened was that Wilde had set out, once the newspaper interview was over, for a glimpse of this sensational Mormonism. He visited John Taylor, president of the organization, successor to Brigham Young, and technically known as "God's Vice-regent upon the earth and the Religious Dictator of the Whole World"—a seventy-year-old, tall, thin man with a short beard, protruding eyebrows, six wives and the unofficial title of "Poet Laureate of Zion"—the result of having written, during the westward migration in the middle 1840's, an ode "The Upper California, Oh, That's the Land for Me." Taylor had been more successful as poet than pathfinder, for Brigham Young had led the people away from upper California to the greater seclusion of Utah. Taylor could explain much of Mormonism to his guest, for he, too, was British born, an English preacher who, in 1837, had deserted Methodism in Canada to follow Joseph Smith, and to escape, narrowly, the assassination which his leader met at Carthage, Illinois. An imposing man, Taylor had been chief missionary to France in 1849-50.

Wilde saw clear mountain water running down ditches on either side of streets, saw householders go out and divert parts of the stream into the little irrigation ditches among their own apricot, peach and plum trees, which were preparing to bloom, white and pink, against the purple shadows of the mountains rearing in the east. He saw the Tabernacle sprawling in the heart of the city, and noted that "it looked like a soup-kettle." Inside were seats for almost 8,000, an English-made organ with 2,000 pipes, whitewashed walls, paper festoons, and remarkable acoustics. A guide, whispering or dropping a pin at one end of the long auditorium, could be heard at the other. Beside the Tabernacle stood the assembly hall or winter tabernacle—so close to it in fact that Oscar Wilde did not note that he was passing from one structure to another. He left, thinking that the murals of the smaller building which was used in cold weather, had been on the walls of the Tabernacle

proper. These frescoes interested him. They were done, he understood, "by the only native artist" and treated religious subjects "in the naïve spirit of the early Florentine painters, representing people of our own day in the dress of the period, side by side with people of Biblical history who are clothed in some romantic costume."

These paintings were of large bee-hives, symbolizing the Mormons' great industry, of Peter, John, James, Moses, John the Baptist, and other prophets conferring priesthoods upon Joseph Smith and two other Latter Day Saints, the Cowderys, Joseph and Oliver.

Gentiles told visitors how sermons in the Tabernacle ranged widely, including such topics as infant baptism, sorghum culture, martyrs of the Church, bed-bug poison, ordination for the priesthood, the best manure for cabbages, the divine inspiration of the Book of Mormon which Joseph Smith had found buried in New York State, the crime of feticide, the sin of skimming milk before selling it—all manner of subjects, since the Church was a thing of influence seven days in the week, not merely on Sundays.

In the auditorium, if he had come at a different day and hour, Oscar Wilde might have heard the strange hymns of the Mormons, songs full of pioneer humor, homely exuberance, and piety, all mixed in a manner most independent of orthodox forms:

Cheer, saints, cheer! We're bound for peaceful Zion!  
 Cheer, saints, cheer! For that free and happy land!  
 Cheer, saints, cheer! We'll Israel's God rely on;  
 We will be led by the power of His hand.

And:

I'm a merry-hearted Mormon, by the truth I am set free,  
 And I wish all the world were as happy as me.

And:

In our lovely Deseret  
 Where the Saints of God have met,  
 There's a multitude  
 Of children all around. . . .  
 That the children may live long  
 And be beautiful and strong,  
 Tea, coffee and  
 Tobacco they despise;  
 Drink no liquor, and they eat  
 But very little meat,

They are seeking to be  
Great and good and wise. . . .

They should always be polite,  
And treat everybody right,  
And in every place  
Be affable and kind.

Near the Tabernacle was rising the Temple, upon which men had been working since 1853, much as artisans had worked on cathedrals in Europe. Across the street was the Tithing House where good Mormons came to pay their regular assessments; The Beehive, home of the late Brigham; The Lion House, where a dozen of his wives had dwelt, some eight still there—while some dozen additional were still living at various other places. It would be explained to a visitor that much of the fury against Mormonism arose out of ignorance concerning “sealing.” To be sealed to a man meant that a woman was bound to him not in this life, but in the life to come, and could not taste with him marital sweets in this existence.

Mormons asked visitors—and Gentiles were forced to admit the facts—how polygamy could be so degrading to women as the outside world maintained, when mass-meetings of Mormon females had voted unanimously to sustain it, speaking passionately of their satisfaction with it and crying out against congressmen who wished to save them.

## 7

As Wilde came upon the stage for his lecture that night of Monday, April 11th, a reporter for the *Herald* heard one spectator say to another that Wilde’s face was like pictures of it; he was reminded of what Rufus Choate had said when he saw his own photograph, “It is ugly as the devil, but it is very like, very like.”

Wilde’s monotonous delivery of his lecture on decoration caught the full force of the *Herald*’s disapproval next day. Wilde had seemed like a schoolboy speaking a piece without the slightest recollection of what he had to say. “He seemed to take no interest whatever in his remarks, for his eyes wandered about and seemed as indifferent as a man well could be . . . he was an enthusiast without enthusiasm.”

The lecture ended with “brief and short-lived applause.”

Next day the *Herald* proclaimed people fools to have attended the lecture and asked why a man “so strikingly awkward,” so sorry at elocution, so ugly, so straight of hair, so vulgar of front teeth, so “painfully dreary in manner of expression” should be the best card in the

pack of current lecturers, "barring female minstrels and leg dramatists." It surmised that the answer was, "The clown is usually the most intellectual, ablest and best-paid man about the circus," and that, "Oscar is by long odds the shrewdest fellow in the house."

Quickly the *Republican*, organ of the Gentiles who, though few by comparison, were bolder now that Congress was going to keep Mormons from voting, attacked the Mormon *Herald* for its strictures against Oscar. The *Republican* declared that the young lecturer was handsome, there was nothing wrong with his front teeth, nor his elocution, nor his hair, nor his subject. "We found the matter of his lecture quite as interesting as Mr. Beecher or Mr. Tilton's or Mrs. Woodhull's." And it accused the *Herald* of being so inartistic as to prove that there was plenty of room for Wilde's art reforms in Salt Lake City. The *Tribune* could not quite join the lecturer in "his slighting allusions to the purely material triumphs of civilization," but it did like his praise of democracy—a dig at a spot made sore in Mormon ribs by national charges of tyranny on the part of John Taylor and the hierarchy.

"Finally," said the *Tribune*, "we should like to see the person in Salt Lake who can fill an hour more entertainingly than Oscar Wilde did on art or any other subject."

By the time Wilde read this comforting opinion, he was deep in more strenuous and memorable matters—Denver, the wild town of the mountains.

## 12

### THE SCARLET AESTHETES OF DENVER

ON one of the days that Wilde rode eastward, a train-boy punched him in the side and shouted, "Hoscar Wilde's poems for ten cents."

Wilde started up to a sitting position and, as one passenger related it, said, "Great God, is it possible my poems have reached such a beastly figure as that?"

"Three for two bits," said the boy, blindly heaping insult on injury, and offering some copies of the Seaside Library edition in paper covers.

The passengers saw Wilde "grab the book and fix his big eyes on the

boy, as he asked him if he knew he was lending his countenance to a hellish infringement on the right of an English author."

The boy answered slowly, "Is that so? Do you suppose the feller that rit the book cares a damn? Why, he won't know it."

"I am the author of those poems," said Wilde.

"Ah, go away," snickered the boy. "You're wringing in for a comish. 'Twon't work, Cully. Folks put jobs on me every day." And, as not too exactly quoted by listening passengers, he went on to say, "If I thought such a looking chap as you rit them lines, d'ye suppose I'd peddle 'em? No, sir! They're cheap, d'ye see? Blarst my picture if I don't feel like a footpad every time I takes a short bit for the rubbish."

The crowded palace car resounded with laughter "in which Wilde heartily joined." A little later when the boy was assured that the man was really Oscar Wilde, he went up manfully and, from his store, offered the poet half a dozen oranges by way of atonement.

"In America," Wilde would soon be telling Englishmen, "there is no opening for a fool. They expect brains, even from a bootblack, and get them. . . . There is no such thing as a stupid American. Many Americans are horrid, vulgar, intrusive, and impertinent, just as many English people are also; but stupidity is not one of the national vices."

Wilde did not, however, enjoy talking with fellow-passengers in American trains. The Yankee, he observed, "as a *companion de voyage* is not desirable, for he always looks *déplacé*, and feels depressed."

It was perhaps this dullness on the part of his companions that caused Wilde to cheer himself with \$6.75 worth of wine between Ogden and Denver.

It seemed to Wilde's iconoclastic nature that England had been wrong to speak so highly of American humor. To a British traveler Americans were not funny, and Oscar observed, "American humor has no real existence. Indeed, so far from being humorous, the male American is the most abnormally serious creature who ever existed. He talks of Europe as being old; but it is he himself who has never been young. He knows nothing of the irresponsible light-heartedness of boyhood, of the graceful insouciance of animal spirits. He has always been prudent, always practical, and pays a heavy penalty for having committed no mistakes. It is only fair to admit that he can exaggerate, but even his exaggeration has a rational basis. It is not founded on wit or fancy; it does not spring from any poetic imagination; it is simply an earnest attempt on the part of the language to keep pace with the enormous size of the country."

In so colossal a land, he said, "the ordinary resources of human speech are quite inadequate to the strain put upon them, and new

linguistic forms have to be invented, new methods of description resorted to. But this is nothing more than the fatal influence of geography upon adjectives; for naturally humorous the American man is certainly not. It is true that when we meet him in Europe his conversation keeps us in fits of laughter; but this is merely because his ideas are so absolutely incongruous with European surroundings . . . what seemed a paradox when we listened to it in London, becomes a platitude when we hear it in Milwaukee.

"America has never quite forgiven Europe for having been discovered somewhat earlier in history than itself. Yet how immense are its obligations to us! How enormous its debt! To gain a reputation for humor, its men have to come to London; to be famous for their toilettes, its women have to shop in Paris."

That Wilde was, at twenty-eight, experienced enough not to judge a country by the crowds of curiosity-seekers, was apparent in his comment to Britishers on American politeness even after his trip from San Francisco to Denver had been so distressing. Word that he was on the train had preceded him and, as he told a reporter when he reached Denver, curious throngs "in daytime, at almost every station crowded the platforms, besieged the car windows and would become actually angry if I did not make an appearance." Yet Wilde could tell Britishers that even if "the American man may not be humorous, he is certainly humane. He tries to be pleasant to every stranger who lands on his shores. He has a healthy freedom from all antiquated prejudices, regards introductions as a foolish relic of medieval etiquette, and makes every chance visitor feel that he is the favored guest of a great nation."

## 2

The Wyoming scenery did not enthrall Oscar Wilde, covering, as it did, the same ground over which he had passed California-bound. Colorado would be better. Wilde awaited it with weary hope, as Cheyenne was reached and cars were changed. As he went south toward Denver, Wilde kept his eyes on the window. Colorado had now come, but where was the scenery? Although it was the twelfth of April, the plains were still streaked and spotted with drifts of winter-worn snow. The sky was as leaden and monotonous as the plains. When the car door opened, in came a clammy wind that had swept down from the Arctic Circle. Cattle stood on the open range with their backs humped with cold, their heads drooping. The train was half an hour late. Damp evening was settling down. Looking at his watch, Wilde saw that he might well be late for his lecture that evening in Denver.

When the train was within forty miles of the city it was boarded by a reporter from the *Republican* and, when nearer the station, by a man from the *Daily News*. Wilde talked freely with each. Being accustomed to the sunburned faces of outdoor men on Denver's wooden sidewalks, the *News* man wrote that Wilde's "complexion is so clear and beautiful



"WILDE ON US"

"Something to 'Live Up' to in America." Thomas Nast in "Harper's Bazaar," June 10, 1882, celebrates Oscar Wilde's tributes to the Western miners as the "only well-dressed men I have seen in America."

that the maidens may well grow green with envy, for no balm or powder can give to their cheeks the peculiar beauty of the Aesthete's complexion." As Wilde's head rested on a pillow the reporter noted large blue eyes as the most prominent feature of his face—and next a very red mouth, a woman's mouth.

Acquaintances of Wilde's, back in England, were saying that he was carrying a make-up box with him on his tour.

The reporters thought him "elegantly proportioned" and much easier of manner, while being interviewed, than most American speakers. He wore a large black hat as he talked rapidly with emphatic gestures.

When asked what he thought of the country, Wilde waved long, tapering fingers toward the window and said, "Everything looks so brown, bare, and disconsolate. You know I have just come from California, which is a garden of beauty. Oh, it is so lovely! The cities of the Atlantic Coast look bare and dreary at this time of year."

A little wave of homesickness struck him. "You know, at home in England it is always green. The green was such a rest to my weary eyes. It is the most restful of all colors. I disliked to leave San Francisco, and I should love to visit it again."

The reporter, long familiar with the dullness of the route from Cheyenne to Denver, was not affronted when Wilde turned and asked, "What is there beautiful in Colorado?" But he blandly ignored the question and in turn asked what American city Wilde had found to be most aesthetic. The poet now had his comments by heart, and repeated them.

Interviewers and interviewed talked of dress, and Wilde said English women were making progress in adopting bright colors. "The milliner is being done away with, and the draper is taking her place. What is prettier than drapery, stately folds for the matron and becoming curves for the maiden?" He damned broadcloth for men, praised velvet and defended knee breeches. "When a man is going to walk, or row, or perform feats which require a display of strength and muscle, the trousers are done away with and knee breeches are worn."

He was candid about his failure as an elocutionist, saying that except for "an occasional wine supper at Oxford" he had never made speeches. It had been only after the first lectures in New York that he had found out "what a difficult task I had undertaken. Americans are natural orators. I never heard a spontaneous burst of oratory until I came to America and listened to an American."

Such talk was copy to a reporter, but it was not the kind of news he had been sent to get. Denver readers wanted to be entertained rather than instructed. They wanted humor in general, and, in particular, the

prolonging of a very funny incident which had been thriving in all the papers of the town.

The *Republican's* representative saw his chance when Wilde asked, "Do you take much interest in aesthetics in Denver?"

"Very much," he answered. "We've just experienced a revival."

"Ah," said Wilde, brightening. "How is it?"

"In this way," began the reporter, and proceeded to give his version of what had been happening.

### 3

But no one man could tell all the funny things that had been happening. For weeks Denver had been preparing for Oscar. Especially had there been excitement in the Street of Love. All through the cribs and parlor-houses of Holladay Street, the chippies had gabbled about sunflowers and knee breeches to each other and to the booted cowboys and miners who came to the gaudy little resorts on errands more carnal than aesthetic. In the brothels of Mattie Silk and Rose Lovejoy had been copied all the exterior precepts of the Pre-Raphaelites—Japanese fans and lanterns, gaudy wrappers, bright dadoes. Inside the austere brownstone front of Jennie Rogers', the notorious but elegant "seven parlors" were spotted with sunflowers, and in the mirror room, the bird's-eye maple room, the Oriental room, her girls screamed "Utterly-utter" like cockatoos in a cage.

In such palaces of sin young miners, loafing, waiting for Spring to let them go back to the mountains, learned the Oscar Wilde slang. Everybody in the tenderloin laughed and said everybody else was "too-too" or "too utterly-utter," and it was agreed over town that the sunflower had become the badge of the chippy.

A couple of days ago, the reporter said, two of the scarlet ladies had come out of a parlor house onto the public thoroughfares "dressed in anticipation of the coming of Oscar Wilde." One of them, Miss Minnie Clifford, had, in the language of the *Republican*, "placed upon her hat, between the port gangway and the rudder chains, an immense sunflower fully a foot in diameter. This, of course, attracted attention and caused comment, to which the gentle apostle of the aesthetic responded with a smile." Beside her walked one of her girls, "Miss Emma Nelson, sporting an immense and a very intense lily."

Among the men whom they had passed on the street was Chief of Police James M. Lomery, who said to those about him, "I'll put a stop to that sort of thing. I'll decorate the inside of the jail with sunflowers

and lilies." So he ordered Officer James Connors to arrest the girls and to conduct them to Judge Sopris for discipline.

But Justice was whimsical in the region. A month ago, a gambler who had shot a man had been fined \$10, five of it for carrying a concealed weapon, and five for disturbing the peace, while two weeks ago, a youth caught standing in the opera house basement and peeping up under ladies' skirts as they ascended the steps, had been fined for "assault and battery." Judge Sopris was the kind of man who would take men accused of theft, find them not guilty, and then admonish them not to do it again.

So when Minnie and Emma had been brought before him on the charge of wearing sunflowers, Judge Sopris had been forced to confess that a search of the statutes revealed no solution for the problem. He announced that while the rage for aestheticism might be a growing evil, still it had not been prohibited by city ordinance, and the wicked women must be freed.

The *Denver Tribune's* managing editor, Eugene Field by name, had observed that Minnie and Emma "promised, however, in the future to eschew the aesthetic sunflower and the seductive lily. Henceforward they must confine themselves to hollyhock and dogfennel blossoms. The edict has gone forth."

Other Denver newspapers had taken up the joke when Chief Lomery, very angry by now, had ordered his men to arrest all notorious women "who were attired in a dress that would attract unusual attention or cause a meretricious display."

Eugene Field had promptly put his paper to bawling for "Oscar Wilde to hurry up and deliver his disciples from the oppression of the tyrant." The *Denver News* demanded Lomery's removal from office. The *Colorado Antelope* whose editor, a Mrs. Churchill, described it as "a paper devoted to the interests of Humanity, Woman's Political Equality and Individuality," and as being especially anxious to have women learn "to shoot, to ride, to swim, to skate and to box," leaped upon the case of Minnie and Emma as "Another Blow at the Liberties of Women."

Her *Antelope* screamed, "In free America, woman is not permitted to wear a sunflower. The scarlet women of Denver are not permitted to adorn themselves with sunflowers. It is supposed that they will be blue women after this."

This had caused wonderment in Colorado, since papers over the State had been predicting that strong-minded, practical Mrs. Churchill could be counted on to meet Oscar Wilde when he arrived in Denver, and take the nonsense out of him.

Soon it was apparent that the good women of Denver were also mad at Chief Lomery. On the Sunday following his unfortunate arrest of Minnie and Emma, it was recorded that "one prominent lady appeared at the Stout Street Cathedral with three sunflowers in her hat and one at her breast." The highly respected Mrs. Forrester was revealed in the papers as announcing she was "painting aesthetic butterflies for gentlemen's wear as a sunflower antithesis"—"a new idea of the utter," remarked Field's columns.

The *Tribune*, hounding Chief Lomery, reported that he had fallen into the hands of Philistines in a suburb, where "after having liberally enthused him, they decorated him with sunflowers, storks, lilies and pipestems. It was not a bad case of meretricious display either."

The befuddled chief had humbly replied that his orders did not apply to the suburbs.

That had settled the fate of aestheticism in Denver. The reporter told Wilde that for the past few days, "Sunflowers were plentiful on the streets, and Chief Lomery had kept severely secluded." The town had been plastered with advertisements capitalizing his approach. Dry goods stores had advertised, "Oscar Wilde patterns in French stamping"; crockery stores, "Oscar Wilde Majolica and Limoges"; H. Ornauer, the artistic tailor, had urged Denver gentlemen to let him dress them properly for Wilde's lecture; Daniels & Fisher's store proclaimed that Oscar Wilde would attend their \$15 suit sale this week; Parker & Killen, fresco artists at 252 Curtis Street, called attention to their new aesthetic delivery wagon which had upon one side a painting representing music, art and literature, upon the other side a beautifully painted fruit piece, while on the back curtain was a pretty landscape.

When the *Republican's* reporter was done with his merry description of Minnie, Emma, and the Chief of Police, he saw Wilde gasp three times and "with indignation blazing in his greenery, gallery stare" say, "He considered a sunflower meretricious? My beautiful sunflower? What kind of man is this chief?" The newsman said Lomery had been converted, whereat he noted Oscar seemed appeased. The conductor had come up just then to announce Denver as only five miles away, and Oscar had "gone into the baggage car and dressed himself."

Denver, waiting impatiently to start laughing at Oscar Wilde, had been disappointed in Eugene Field. Here was the funny man of the town, the wit of the city, the sharp-penned humorist whom the *Tribune* had imported to "scathe" public butts, here was Field flattening out

weakly on what should have been the choicest subject of the year. He hadn't ridiculed Oscar once.

Readers couldn't believe their eyes, when the *Tribune* had printed a

### THEY ARE PRETTY SAFE THERE.

*When Politicians do Agree, their Unanimity is Wonderful.*



*"GIVE IT TO HIM, HE'S GOT NO VOTE NOR NO FRIENDS!"*

### THE POOR CHINEE

*Politicians of all parties belaboring the Chinese for political effect.*  
*"Puck," April 5, 1882.*

warning, almost pious, certainly virtuous, against anybody having fun with the Aesthete:

"Oscar Wilde will be here next week, and there is no reason why he should not be well received. Any development of the rudeness which is

called smartness will be a disgrace to Denver. This sort of thing does well enough in the East, where they are somewhat lacking in the finer qualities, but it will not do in Colorado, where people are well-bred.

"He may be in earnest or he may be a sham. These matters do not concern the public especially. He goes before it with something to say, and if it doesn't care to hear him it can stay away."

"He is young enough to grow and when the growth begins it will be rapid."

This wasn't like Eugene Field, the readers said, remembering how he, serving as dramatic critic as well as managing editor, had often taken the hide off any public performer who could be suspected of affectation. For instance the time the Reverend George W. Miln, that Chicago preacher who had turned Shakespearean actor, had come to town.

Cautioned by his superiors to go easy on the cleric, Field had obeyed orders. His entire criticism consisted of two sentences: "The Reverend George Miln played *Hamlet* at the Opera House last night. He played it until eleven o'clock."

And that time he had said of another Shakespearean, "He played the king as though he expected somebody else to play the ace."

Or the time Field had written, "Buffalo Bill, an alleged scout and a very bad actor, is said to have fallen into a fortune of two million dollars in Cleveland. This is good news for Bill. It would have been better for the public if Bill had fallen into a well."

Field had been lecturing Denver similarly on April 6th, when word had come that Lily Langtry had halted her plans for invading the New York theater because she had read of "Oscar Wilde's boisterous reception in certain localities, and expressed considerable timidity about coming to America." In the *Tribune* Field had answered, "She need not be alarmed. The people on this side of the pond have better business than that of insulting a woman, no matter how mediocre her talents may be."

It was not like the *Tribune* itself to be approving and protecting so national a butt as Wilde, for the newspaper was a gay and reckless one, operated by a coalition of railroad magnates and political leaders for their own ends, and could thus be free from the necessity of making money—which it never did. As a political weapon, it prided itself upon extravagance, humor, brightness, and upon the mental superiority of its staff.

During the past year, its editor, Ottamar H. Rothacker, and its publisher, Frederick Skiff, Jr., had noted how the managing editor of the *Kansas City Times* was just the man they needed, a witty, scorch-

ing writer. So Rothacker had gone to Kansas City and come back with Field, a delicate young man of thirty-one, with thin hair plastered close to his large head, who must now support a wife, two small children, and his own barroom habits upon \$40 a week.

A modest fellow he turned out to be when anything was said of his verse, which he had started to write two years before in Kansas City. "Popular but rotten," was all he would say about his best-known poem, "The Little Peach" which had been copied all over America, and sung from the stage by Henry E. Dixie, Sol Smith Russell, and most of the musical comedians until there was scarcely a soul in America, it seemed, who did not know about Johnny Jones and his sister Sue and their fatal consumption of the green fruit—"Boo Hoo!"

Field did not associate with Denver's intelligentsia even if his superiors, Rothacker and Skiff, did. He spent his idle hours in saloons, or sitting with young men on the sunny side of the street waiting for something to laugh at. Nobody was ever very sure whether Field was drunk when frolicking in barrooms, or whether he was merely so vivacious as to appear drunk. But nobody in Denver understood Field well anyway.

Stories of his eccentricities, witticisms, and practical jokes were always floating around town. Over his desk in the *Tribune* office hung a sign which he had invented, "This is my busy day." Political reporters told how Field had written a speech for a Negro politician to give in introducing a white orator—"Although he has a white skin, his heart is as black as any of ours." Drunks in saloons told how sweetly Field could play the piano, how he made them cry when his deep voice sang Negro spirituals, how he made them laugh as his expressive tones and face delivered anecdotes, mimicked all sorts of characters, and then how he could make them cry again with pathetic tales he made upon the spur of no occasion at all.

Back in Kansas City, George Gaston, the café owner, loved to tell how Field, whom he worshiped, had got far behind on his bar-bill when time came for him to leave for Denver. Rothacker had come for him, and the two men, followed by Field's friends—quite a party—had come down to Gaston's for a last drink and farewell.

Gaston asked, "Gene, when are you going to pay me what you owe me?"

It was quite a sum, and Field countered with, "Do I get a discount for cash?"

"Yes," said Gaston.

"How much of a discount?" persisted Field, who, as George Gaston well knew, had not a cent in his pocket.

"Here, I'll tell you what I'll do," said George. "Pay me a dollar and I'll give you a receipt in full."

Field turned to Rothacker. "Lend me a dollar," he said, and gave



#### TENNIS: BACK STROKE

*"The back stroke is a 'show play' and attracts great applause."* "Century Magazine," February, 1882.

it to Gaston. "Now, George," said he, "you know that when a customer pays his bill in full, the proprietor is expected to stand treat."

"That's right," answered George, consumed with admiration. "What'll it be?"

"Champagne," said Field. "Champagne for the party."

In Denver it was being said, in 1882, that Field had played identically the same trick upon the proprietor of Perrins's bar. Even the victims of his jokes could never grow outraged enough to assault the thin

young man with the captivating eyes, not even Colonel Cooper, who had been lampooned by Field because he was so reserved and aloof.

Field had said in a society note: "Colonel G. K. Cooper went swimming in the hot water pool at Manitou last Sunday afternoon, and the place was used as a skating rink in the evening."

Particularly did Field like to bedevil Carlyle Channing Davis, the reporter-poet. At times he wrote embarrassing poems and signed Davis's name to them, and once he had Davis arrested on silly charges and taken to jail in a patrol wagon.

Davis retorted by exposing how Field had gone to a hotel at Manitou, a spa near Colorado Springs, and had been angered because, overflowing with guests, it had consigned him to a cot in the hall. To get revenge he had pretended to have cramps and had gotten all guests out of bed, deep in the night, to sympathize with his horrible groans. Not content with that, Field had arisen, after all the kind strangers had returned to bed, and had changed all their shoes in front of the bedroom doors. The better to witness their confusion he had beaten a gong up and down the halls at an unnecessarily early hour.

On this trip his fit of mischief had been prolonged. On the way back to Denver he had bandaged himself so that he might secure two seats on the crowded train, arising only when nearing Denver to pass the hat for himself. "And he kept the money," Davis added.

Davis warned people that Field had once attended a Thanksgiving dinner given by "swells" in Colorado Springs and had inserted a cannon cracker in the roast turkey so that it scattered dressing all over the frescoed walls. And how Field had invited a visiting Countess to meet a foreign friend and had led her up to a burro.

## 5

Denver would be different from any city Oscar Wilde had ever seen. Here was a town without a single man who had been born in it. Practically all of the inhabitants had lived in the town less than ten years. In 1871, Denver's population was estimated at less than 5,000 people. In 1882, it had between 35,000 and 65,000 inhabitants, depending upon the time of year estimates were made. The city had an immense floating population, transients who at the first sign of spring left town for the mountains and the mines.

The census was generally taken during the winter months. Rival towns claimed that Denver's census takers padded the rolls, copying names from the headstones in the graveyard, or enumerating excursion-

ists while their train stopped for dinner. The 1880 census had counted 34,629, an increase of 648.7 per cent in the decade.

Denver owed its miraculous growth to the discovery of mines in the mountains beyond the city—the heights where six to eight feet of snow covered the ground during most of the year. The story was going around that two prospectors, snowshoeing up Mosquito Trail to the mines, met one day and as they filled their pipes before continuing their journey one asked, "How soon can we look for spring up here?"

"I don't know," the other replied. "I've only been here eighteen months."

No wonder the Bonanza Kings, grown suddenly wealthy in the mountains, moved down to the plains to build their residences. Denver, the terminus of five railroads, was the outlet to the world for gold, silver, lead, zinc.

Despite Denver's immense floating population, it had none of the mushroom appearance of a mining camp. Most of the residences were three- and four-room one-story houses surrounded with small yards and shade trees. Water babbled through the gutters in the streets. In the downtown district the porch roofs of many stores covered the sidewalks. The new buildings were substantial, generally three stories high and constructed of brick. The "Tabor Block," built of stone shipped at great expense from Ohio, had six stories. The St. James, the Alvord and the Windsor Hotels were thoroughly modern with rococo luxuries.

Along Cherry Creek, on the Heights and in the neighborhood which some people were preparing to name Capital Hill, magnificent mansions had been constructed. A \$60,000 home had just been completed for H. A. W. Tabor, owner of the Tabor Block and the most spectacular of the Bonanza Kings. Other men who had made millions in the mines were Willard Teller and Nathaniel P. Hill, both senators in 1882; Ed Wolcott and Tom Bowen, both of whom wished to be senator. David Moffat, financier and railroad builder, was the principal banker in the city. Baron Von Richthofen was building a \$6,000 house on South Broadway.

Social life was as splendid as in most Eastern cities. Gay blades spun along the dirt streets in shiny-wheeled buggies. "Scores of flyers are to be seen coursing the public thoroughfares," wrote the *Denver Tribune* as it noticed the first signs of spring in 1882. "No animal in Colorado gives better promise than Colonel John E. Leet's imported gelding, 'Jupiter Pluvius,' who was sired by Thunder and dammed by Everybody." Men of the town said only Eugene Field could have written that. Fashionable young people were studying rules of the game that was stirring stylish folk in the East—lawn tennis.

Businessmen and workers were too busy making money to do any buzzing about the Apostle of Beauty. The city had just started on the greatest boom of its existence. Real estate values were going up by leaps and bounds. There were not enough houses to supply the population. Rents were exorbitant. A fifteen hundred dollar house rented readily for \$35 per month, almost 30 per cent on the investment each year, and carpenters and builders could not ply their trade fast enough.

There were seventy real estate agencies in the city. Salesmen told prospective investors about the man who purchased a lot for \$90, traded it six years later for a buggy worth \$80, and now, with the boom, that lot had sold for \$42,000. "It makes the man sick every time he sees the buggy go by on the streets."

Denver had no tall buildings. As it grew, it spread over the plains. Suburbs were incorporated and lots surveyed. In South Denver, rubbish was being cleaned from a vacant lot when gold was noticed. A large crowd immediately assembled. Technical tenderfeet discussed "true fissures," "pockets," "bedrock," and "pay dirt," while real miners sank a shaft. The shaft encountered a brick wall which disturbed the technical tenderfeet "but which assayed as richly as the rubbish." The lot was estimated to give up \$20,000 in gold. The residents had forgotten that their city was built on the ruins of a vanished city of Denver that had flourished during the Civil War. The lot was on the site of an old smelter.

It was silver rather than gold that made Denver a great city in the Eighties. The mines at Leadville on top of the Rockies were nearly at the peak of their production, many of them turning out a hundred thousand dollars a month. But mines and miners were not the only source of revenue in the growing town. The past two years had been the most prosperous years the cattle business had ever known. Thousands and thousands of "longhorns" grazed on the plains between Denver and the eastern horizon, and beyond. Picturesque cowboys in high-heeled boots clumped up and down the steps of the wooden sidewalks. Wagon-loads of grub were purchased and hauled to distant roundups.

Items about harlots were common in the press. The *Tribune* reported, "Tom Ryan attempted to arrest two drunken Cyprians. One of them got away, but he got the other into a beer wagon and hauled her to jail. When she saw that she could not escape, she amused herself by kicking beer barrels into the street from the wagon."

Men were not to be outdone by their consorts. "Two drunken men yesterday came racing up Arapahoe Street 'hell bent for election,' and howling for all they were worth. One of them preferred sitting back on the horse instead of on the saddle. The horse suddenly jumped and

the rider turned a very pretty somersault, landing on his back on the ground. The unwilling acrobat caught and mounted his horse and rode off."

Runaways were a daily occurrence in Denver streets. The thunder of



#### OVERHAND SERVICE IN LAWN TENNIS

*"Century Magazine," February, 1882.*

horses' hoofs and the splintering of buggies was as usual a sound as the tattoo of the carpenters' hammers.

"A hack-load of females, supposed to be of easy virtue, came dashing down Lawrence Street at a furious rate last evening. The driver, as well as the inmates of the hack, appeared to be drunk. The driver seemed to have lost all control of his horses, which ran up Holladay Street to Thirty-seventh Street, when they ran into a pile of lumber. This did not check their course, however, and when last seen, the team

the thousands of instances where this hopeful scheme had been practiced, Tabor's won. The prospectors struck "pay dirt" and Tabor's share within a year was \$500,000. He sold his equity for a million to Messrs. Chaffee & Moffat, who organized a mining company. With apparent folly he sunk much of this in the company. It was agreed he was a lamb born for fleecing. But his shares, bought at \$5, rose to \$30, and he became a multi-millionaire with clouds of swindlers buzzing like gnats around his head wherever he walked. He gave a glib-tongued promoter named Chicken Bill \$40,000 for a mine, found it worthless, poured good money after bad, sank the mine shaft eight feet deeper and struck the richest body of ore ever to be found at Leadville, that richest of mining centers.

Owners of another unproductive hole in the ground flattered him into giving them \$117,000 for it, and departed laughing. Tabor paid \$40,000 to quiet legal claims, tens of thousands more for mine machinery, and even while his experts and lawyers begged him to admit being fooled, he proved the hole to be a bonanza—the Matchless Mine, famous far and wide for richness—and earning him, now in 1882, over \$2,000 a day.

In this April, 1882, financial journals were predicting that Tabor would soon be the world's richest man. His mines in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas were said to bring him \$4,000,000 a year, while more millions poured in from his lumber mills, real estate holdings, insurance companies, gas and water franchises. His large interest in Chaffee & Moffat's First National Bank of Denver was lucrative. His agents were busy plotting corners in wheat and corn. He owned control of the Calumet & Chicago Canal and Dock Company and was scheming to build a harbor and manufacturing center on Lake Michigan to rival Chicago—a city of his own. The Tabor Investment Company had agencies in New York, London, Amsterdam, and Paris.

The wife who had kept boarders for eighteen years was discarded and was suing for half his estate. Ten million dollars she said he was worth. Tabor was eyeing with love a beauty named Baby Doe McCourt. He wanted to marry her, then if his Senate plans came true, to take her to Washington and let the President of the United States see him marry her again.

The town of Leadville, standing above Denver at the top of the Rockies, had been booming in the late Seventies, and Tabor was the most celebrated of its Bonanza Kings. As his millions poured in, he built extravagant opera houses in Leadville and Denver, and became a patron of the arts. An architect, ordered to make the Denver opera house the finest in the world, had topped off his efforts by placing a

bust of Shakespeare at the key of the proscenium arch. Tabor, entering when the theater was done, surveyed everything with satisfaction until he had come to this bust of the Bard.

"Who's that?" he had cried.

"William Shakespeare," the architect had replied.



#### UNDERHAND SERVICE IN LAWN TENNIS

*"Century Magazine," February, 1882.*

"Shakespeare?" Tabor had repeated. "Shakespeare? What in hell did he ever do for Denver? Take him down; put me up there."

So good did Tabor feel about his two opera houses that he planned to build them in Kansas City, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York.

The Republican Party in Colorado had needed Tabor's contributions and had given him the harmless reward of the Lieutenant-Governorship. This had whetted his taste for further political preferment and had set him upon his present chase after a senator's toga.

The career of his rival, Bowen, had been scarcely less spectacular. An itinerant politician by trade, a carpetbagger in Arkansas, Territorial Governor of Idaho, he had come in the late Seventies to Colorado to practice law, poker, and faro. When deep in debt he suddenly discovered a ridiculous mining claim was a fabulous gold mine.

Bowen and Tabor met often in Denver's Palace Saloon where they liked to talk politics and play cards. Bowen was best at politics and Tabor at poker.

What Governor Pitkin would do between such contestants nobody could be sure. The *Denver News* was crying, "There are twenty-six men in the United States Senate because they are millionaires. Why should Tabor be barred on account of his millions?"

## 6

While Tabor waited for the Governor to decide, he waited for Oscar Wilde to arrive. He was as anxious as anybody to see the Aesthete. Oscar was to speak in his opera house and live in his hotel, the Windsor. Tabor would have given the Britisher the bridal suite, the Windsor's best, but his own Senatorial campaign headquarters filled it. Neither could he give Wilde the next best suite, The Ladies' Parlors, for a conclave of cattle barons had it taken for a protracted discussion of how to keep quiet their recent lynching of five cow rustlers out on the plains.

Tabor had finally told Bill Bush, his man Friday and nominally manager of the Windsor, to leave no room unpapered that might offend Oscar. Bill Bush had in the service of Tabor been equal to many difficult occasions and he was not lacking now. Earlier experience as a professor of mathematics had been useful to him in frontier gambling and in managing his chief's intricate financial transactions. He was himself not unaesthetic, as was known by the Denver which had watched him driving two magnificent black horses very rapidly around town. One horse he had named H. A. W. Tabor and the other Lily Langtry.

Rumors of Bill's preparation for Oscar Wilde had begun to stir Denver a week before the poet's arrival, and, on April 8th, the *Tribune* reported its own examination:

"A suite of rooms are being put in order for Oscar Wilde on the second floor. The parlor walls are covered with pink-tinted paper upon which lilies are traced in faint coloring. The dadoes are very wide and represent storks wading around among sunflowers. In the bedroom there will be a ceiling fresco representing 'The Genius of Renaissance'—a beautiful piece of work designed by Mr. Edbrook, the architect of the Grand Opera House. The wall paper will be of a bottle-green color

relieved by poppies. Mr. Bush has ordered an elegant bedstead from Chicago and a swansdown mattress. The bathroom will contain statuary and frescoes of Cupids and Venuses."

Tabor was busy with last-minute reception plans on April 12th when he got word that one of his worries was over for the time being. The Governor had appointed a third man, Chilcott, senator. Tabor was not, however, devastated. An election would soon be held, and he would have the inside track.

Among the cowboys and miners who lined the sunny side of Denver's streets waiting for something to laugh at, the rumor flew that this Oscar Wilde was some kind of an impostor who would take the coin away from the swells—something like a gambler, but not quite.

And now it was being said, laughingly, that Wilde might be as good as Denver's two most notorious sharpers, Soapy Smith and Doc Baggs.

Of the two, Doc Baggs was the best known, having reached his pinnacle of renown just as Oscar Wilde was due in town. Everybody in Denver knew Baggs as a well-dressed gentleman who went along the wooden sidewalks in a glossy stovepipe hat and shining silk umbrella.

Baggs had been a printer who, losing a finger of his right hand in the presses, had become a reporter, then a three-card monte dealer, and at last a promoter of large pretensions. His game, for years, had been to ride up and down Union Pacific trains carrying a physician's satchel. Choosing a victim, he would sit down beside him, draw him into conversation, convince him that he looked ill, convince him that he *was* ill, open his satchel, take out a bottle of medicine, give the patient a teaspoonful, then convince him that he was well.

This, as Doc candidly explained, put the fellow in such a frame of mind that he would invest in anything that the pseudo-physician might suggest—gold mines or cards, for instance. In his office on Larimer Street stood a most substantial safe which, when Doc had first come to town, had by its very air of responsibility convinced the leading bankers that Baggs was sincere in his announced intention of opening the Commercial Bank of Denver. Not yet had the city learned that this safe could be folded into a trunk when haste was obligatory.

Judge Sopris, as kind to Baggs as to Minnie Clifford, had announced that in his court Doc Baggs's word was as good as his bond. The adventurer had gone on to acquire an interest in a hack-line and a pawnshop while he waited for flies hunting mining-stock sugar to walk into his parlor.

Doc's greatest notoriety came while Oscar Wilde was traveling from Salt Lake City to Denver. The Honorable Miguel Otero, Territorial Delegate to Congress from New Mexico, banker at Las Vegas, and vice-

president of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, had met a pleasant spoken young man on Denver's streets. The youth had said he was one of Otero's constituents from Las Vegas, a range-boy unused to the great city and in need of a great banker's aid. He had come to Denver for a time, had won in a lottery, but did not know how to collect his money. Would Otero help him? Otero would, gladly, and they walked up a crooked stairway into the office of Doc Baggs. The virtuous safe, emblazoned with "Commercial Bank of Denver" was gone, and in its place stood a large lottery wheel.

Otero presented the boy's ticket to a man in green glasses who responded with \$75 and a gracious smile. The boy thought he'd risk a small part of it. The wheel spun and the boy was given another award. The Vice-President of the Santa Fe thought he would take advantage of his opportunity, risked a small sum and won. Soon both banker and boy were winning like mad, and the night wore on. It was late when Otero, finding no more money in his pockets, signed a note for \$2,400 and staggered down the stairs.

Next morning Señor Otero visited the police station and the police were quickly at Doc Baggs's office demanding the note. Doc was courteous. He said he had bought the note from the man in the green glasses and had resold it to a third party. Both he and Otero were bankers and both knew the note must be paid. The police reported helplessly to the lord of Las Vegas, while Doc Baggs, complacent as ever, walked the wooden sidewalks, saying to inquisitive reporters, "My business is to skin suckers. I defy anyone to put their hands on a single man I ever beat who was not financially able to stand it."

News of this confession spread through the barrooms and gambling houses. The loafers on the streets now had two things to laugh at, Doc Baggs and Oscar Wilde. The *News* was printing an ode to Oscar—

We hail thee as the most successful humbug of the age,  
If thou dost boast of being too,  
We will produce Charles Baggs, M.D.  
Who is as too as thou art, and a durned sight tooer.

And its editor, Colonel Arkins, hounding Chief Lomery for his failure to arrest Baggs, announced that the officer "intends to escort Oscar Wilde from the train to the jail."

Eugene Field, very anxious to plague Arkins and to defend from the Philistines, if possible, a fellow poet and lecturer, declared in his columns, "It is said that Colonel Arkins will introduce Oscar Wilde to the Denver public tomorrow night. He will wear a breech-clout and a sunflower."

With Denver in this state of mind the long-looked-for night arrived. Oscar was due at the Union Station at 7:40 p.m. He would lecture at 8:10. The city of Denver was waiting for him: Moffat, Bowen, Tabor, Chief Lomery, Ornaurer, the artistic tailor, Doc Baggs, reporters for nineteen newspapers, hack-drivers, carpenters, plasterers, real estate agents, insurance salesmen, cowboys, miners, gamblers, hundreds of young men waiting for spring and looking for something to laugh at. Gay belles in houses on Cherry Creek took a last look in their mirrors. Bawds on Holladay Street put a sunflower in the window and rearranged their seductive lilies.

It was a cold, snowy April night, not uncommon in Colorado. The railroad platform was a wharf in a lake of mud. The tops of the hacks waiting in the gloom were white with snow, the horses steamed with it. In the crowded waiting-room at the station men shook their coats before the roaring stoves. Long skeins of tobacco smoke veiled the gas jets and the air smelled of wet clothes and horses.

A telegram announced that the train was half an hour late. Many of the waiting crowd, including Locke, who was in town preparing for Wilde's arrival, turned up their coat collars and splashed off to the more spacious waiting-rooms in the saloons on Blake Street. While they were gone the train pulled in, ahead of time, and stopped at a distant platform. J. S. Vale, apprehensive for the lecture already past due, jumped off the train into the blizzard, prowled through the railroad yards, chasing waving lanterns, dodging headlights that loomed suddenly above him in the storm, stumbling over switches, shouting frantically for Mr. Locke.

Their charge was here!

## 13

### “EUGENE FIELD PLAYS IT PRETTY LOW-DOWN”

AS Oscar Wilde stepped from his train at the Denver station on the night of April 12th, the crowd saw, amid the whirling snowflakes, that he was a very large man wearing a black slouch hat of the kind peculiar to cowboys and miners, baggy brown trousers, and a fur-lined overcoat. Nobody could see the knee breeches and velvet coat underneath, which, in the baggage car, Oscar had donned for the lecture.

The crowd blocked his way to the carriage, and when his assistants and the *Tribune* reporter had made a lane for him, it formed so densely in the street that the carriage could not move. While Locke, excited because his charge was late, slowly cleared room for the horses to move, the reporter sat inside the carriage with Wilde, listening to the crowd shout, "Hello, Oscar!", "Let us see you, Oscar old boy!" and "Put your head out the window, Oscar; we know you're in there!" Noses were pressed against the glass window of the carriage.

"I suppose this scene is familiar to you," said the reporter.

"Yes, it is so everywhere," Oscar answered, smiling. "This is a simple curiosity you know. It is the evidence of an unfinished civilization. In Europe the people are less curious about public characters, and are not rude."

The horses were soon trotting briskly toward the Opera House. Then they stopped, and Wilde was hurried in at the stage door and to a dressing-room where Vale had a small bottle of champagne waiting. Oscar drank half of it while smoothing his hair and adjusting his tie. Then he went on.

## 2

Long before eight o'clock the fashionable and cultured folk of Denver had been arriving at the Opera House, and until fifteen minutes after eight closed carriages had been inching in an unbroken line to the door. Out of respect for Denver's extravagance and its bonanza prices, Locke had raised the customary Wilde fee of \$1 to \$1.50. Newspaper reporters noted a painful lack of aesthetic dress among the arrivals. Only one sunflower was to be seen. It was on the back of a lady's hat, and many observers wondered if Minnie Clifford had dared invade so respectable a gathering to flaunt her loyalty to aestheticism.

The curtain went up to the accompaniment of no music. What Denver regarded as a charming drawing-room was revealed. On its center table stood one lily blooming alone, and on a shelf, below, stood a huge basket of flowers. During the day, Stage Carpenter Alexander and his assistants had been working to give Wilde a setting unlike anything the Opera House had had before. "I can't quite catch on to what this aethete business is," Alexander had told a *Times* reporter, "but I'm trying to get up something attractive and new." The audience eventually grew weary of admiring his work, took to sailing a few paper sunflowers about the house, then stopped as an usher strode onto the stage and poured out a glass of water. It was noted that he used a cut-glass decanter, and among those well posted on Wilde's lectures, it was

whispered that the lecturer hated cut-glass. The boy disappeared and again the audience grew restless.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Oscar came with slow step through the red curtains at the back of the stage, and made his way to the center table with what the *Times* reporter thought was "a languid, dreamy sort of walk such as one would think a lovesick girl would have in wandering through a moonlit garden. His mouth is an Irish mouth and an Irish woman's mouth at that." A hundred lorgnettes were leveled at him and "a merry decorous laughter went up from the parquette."

The *News* reporter complained that Oscar began to talk without even addressing his audience as ladies and gentlemen. The *Tribune's* critic observed that "at times Wilde would smile in an ingenuous manner as if realizing something amusing had been said; and half modestly and half in embarrassment his hand would seek the flowing locks on the left side of his head and gently push them back from his face on which they had fallen through the excitement of the risibilities." Reporters noted that he lifted a handkerchief to his lips now and then "with the delicacy that a lady puts the finishing touch upon a face cosmetic."

The audience sat to the end with the silence and courtesy that Wilde had learned to expect in the West, but it was obvious that the people were spectators, not listeners. As soon as he had floated off stage to the accompanying ripple of polite applause, he was joined by the *Tribune* reporter, who heard him say as he entered his dressing-room, "Well, this is jolly; to travel in the close atmosphere of those coaches six hundred miles on a stretch and then give a lecture before resting." As he emptied the remaining half of the champagne bottle, he talked to the reporter about art. He said "many pleasant things as chirrupy as though he had just awakened from a refreshing sleep upon a bed of posies."

The *Tribune* man followed Wilde as they evaded the crowd which had waited all evening in the Windsor lobby to see him. Up the elevator they went and into the room where a supper awaited him on a table. Throwing off his overcoat, the Aesthete went promptly to the table, cried, "Take away this tea and bring me a bottle of this wine." He pointed to the wine list and as the waiter looked to see what it was, Oscar added, "And two glasses."

The reporter saw Wilde look over the fish, potatoes, omelet, mutton chops, many relishes, bread and butter, then, taking a taste of the fish, order it away. He drank a glass of wine, cut into a mutton chop when a knock came at the door. Wilde answered it himself. It was a citizen calling with congratulations. More of them came, and for what seemed

hours the reporter watched the hungry Oscar give himself over to the duty of entertaining.

## 3

Dinner was indefinitely postponed when a certain huge and clumsy bulk of masculinity hove through the door and a cloudy countenance, cut across by a huge longhorn mustache, faced Oscar. It was Tabor himself, come to invite the poet to visit the Matchless Mine up at Leadville.

"I shall be delighted," said Wilde. "Of all things that which I most desire to see is a mine."

In time Tabor barged out through the door, the parade of callers stopped, and Wilde returned to the cold food and the reporter's questions.

"When will your new book of poems appear?" asked the *Tribune* man.

"Not until after I return to Europe. I hardly think it practicable to write it here. There are so many things which I had intended which are impracticable, you know." He could not write in America. He could find neither the time nor the surroundings in America suitable to his themes. There were so many new experiences crowding upon him that he could only take notes.

"When I return to Venice I will begin to write, and whatever I have seen to impress me in America, whether of the beauties of nature or of men and women, I will write and give America credit for it."

The reporter asked about the play Wilde had written, and was told that it had been ready for two years and was soon to be produced.

"How were you impressed by your trip to California?"

"How can I tell you? I could talk to you all night about it. California is an Italy without its art. There are subjects for the artist, but it is universally true that the only scenery which inspires utterance is that which man feels himself the master of. The mountains of California are so gigantic that they are not favorable to art or poetry. There are good poets in England but none in Switzerland. There the mountains are too high. Art cannot add to nature."

He went on to say that where the grandeur of nature existed, schools of art "were devoted to the face and figure."

At this point Wilde, having finished one mutton chop and the omelet, pushed back his plate and took another glass of wine. Warmed, he grew eloquent on art until the reporter abruptly asked him what he thought of the Mormons.

Wilde said he had found President Taylor a courteous, charming, and kindly gentleman whose house "had a good deal of feeling in it in the way of pleasing works of art and good furniture."

"But," he declared, "the Tabernacle has the shape of a soup-kettle and decorations suitable for a jail. It was the most purely dreadful building I ever saw. There was not even the honesty to tell the truth,



#### HIGHWAY ROBBERY

*"A recent robbery by road agents near Leadville. Searching a commercial traveler for valuables." "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," November 11, 1882.*

because they painted sham pillars. There are no pillars in the building. In the house of God, I think, no lies should be told.

"The city interested me because it was the first city that ever gave me a chance to see ugly women. The people, as a body of humanity, have the most ignoble forms I ever saw and the women are commonplace in every sense of the word."

Many who read Wilde's words next day in the *Tribune* recalled how Mark Twain, visiting Salt Lake City in the 1860's, had made much the same comment on its women. Other readers wondered if either Twain or Wilde knew how the dry air of Utah ravaged the complexions of women so many of whom were blondes from Scandinavia or Saxons from Germany and England.

On polygamy Oscar grew epigrammatic, saying that while Salt Lake

City's "execrable architecture" was bad enough, the place robbed life of romance—"for the romance of life is that one can love so many people and marry but one."

The reporter pressed Wilde to say how Americans compared with Europeans.

"To us in Europe," came the answer, "America is looked upon as a nation, simple and grand, and I thought that the moment they heard what I had to say, they would understand me and realize what I meant by life and art. I find that I am wrong." However, said he, Westerners had listened with more simplicity, more real interest and desire to know what he had to say, than had Easterners. "The West has kept itself free and independent while the East has been caught and spoiled with many of the flirting follies of Europe."

For a time the reporter watched Wilde glance over "a great pile of letters" that awaited him, and saw him toss many away. The interview was done and the reporter admitted next day that the handshake and adieu he had given the gifted young gentleman was "affectionate."

## 4

The next morning Wilde left over the South Park Railroad for Leadville, with the *Denver Times* saying that in his long hair and wide-brimmed hat he looked "not unlike a Texas ranger who had struck it rich. Notwithstanding his two days' journey from Salt Lake, a talk of an hour and a half on an empty stomach, and not a very long rest, Mr. Wilde looked as fresh as though he did not know what it was to travel." And the *Republican* declared that if placed in a mining camp dance hall he would pass for "a real bold, bad man." Most other newspaper critics described his lecture as that of a charlatan and as being "disappointing" and "silly," but Eugene Field's championship was apparent in the *Tribune's* summary:

"Mr. Wilde made an excellently good impression in Denver yesterday evening. The very smart people on newspapers who do not know much, have done their best to represent him as a guy, but their success has been small. He has, himself, been a sufficient answer to all their flippancies. He understands his subject, and he knows how to talk about it. He may seem absurd to some people, because everything outside of the common routine seems absurd to them, but he is not responsible for the density of their gray matter nor should he be compelled to shoulder the effects of their ignorance. Mr. Wilde is a quiet, unobtrusive, intelligent gentleman with something to say. He says this something in admirable and fitting English. He is worthy of the atten-

tion of intelligence, and we are glad that he is receiving it. He is not a nobody to see, but a somebody to listen to."

The *Denver Times* had discovered a resident of the city who had gone to school with Oscar Wilde. The Englishman claimed that he had slept with Oscar in the same dormitory, although not in the same bed. During school days the future Aesthete had not mixed well with his playmates. He had preferred to look at peacocks' feathers and the red labels on tomato cans. Once he had been induced to play cricket, but he had soon fled to his room, where he wrote a rhyme about the match:

Never more will I play  
With the soaring and gay  
But cruel in its fall—  
The mean old cricket ball.

Wilde, who was to return to Denver after lectures at Leadville and Colorado Springs, ignored this reputedly first of his poetic efforts and Denver could not be sure whether it was authentic or the sportive invention of an impostor.

Denver was more curious as to what the hell-roaring town of Leadville would do to the Aesthete. The pranks of its population, mostly bachelor and bibulous, were legion. "Badger fights" were gay diversions, with a stranger persuaded to bet that a dog could whip a badger which was brought on concealed in a covered barrel. While the bull-dog foamed with anger and bets ran high, the stranger was awarded the honor of drawing the badger from his barrel. Careful pulls at a rope amid breathless suspense ended with the stranger drawing forth a chamber pot, losing his stake and being forced to set up drinks for the roaring bystanders.

Often when Eastern gentlemen descended from trains, Leadville miners or loafers would fall in behind them to walk single-file in a long and solemn line uptown. Leadville would bet on anything, and upon more than one occasion had lined tenderloin streets to wager as two girls from the cribs raced without even track suits to hamper them.

Denver was fond of telling of Leadville's famous bootblack who had a canine assistant whose duty it was to soil gentlemen's boots.

Across the West it was said that Leadville was the wildest and most tempestuous municipality on earth, and it had grown from 1,200 to 60,000 in six months. As a matter of fact the city, when Oscar Wilde saw it, held probably something near to the number established by the U. S. Census of two years before, 14,000, although some ardent townsfolk declared the correct number was nearer 30,000. The people of Leadville were as difficult to count as to count on. Thousands of itin-

erant miners and cowboys lived in boarding houses, often for months at a time, without registering anywhere in the city.

During the past four years there had been a killing every two months—a low average with so many labor strikers and claim-jumpers rampaging about town—but the town had had two murders in the week before Wilde's advent, a fact which Denverites, with the Westerners' fondness for terrorizing tenderfeet, did not keep from the aesthetic guest. One of the killings had taken place in front of the very opera house where he was to speak. A gambler from Missouri had shot it out with a man whom he had warned away from his wife. The other man had shot straightest.

Two days ago, Wilde would be told as he left for Leadville, two demimondaines had had a cutting scrape on Harrison Avenue, and ten days before that, a matron of the camp, meeting Judge A. W. Stone on the street, had cowhided him unmercifully.

Less than a week ago, the *Denver News* had reported Leadville's awakening interest in lawlessness. A citizen had killed a policeman and had been actually indicted for it. "Leadville, as a whole, is determined that this shooting on sight whenever convenient must be stopped."

Many men of Denver reminded Oscar Wilde that Leadville was "the toughest as well as the richest city in the world and that every man carried a revolver."

Not long after leaving the camp, Wilde would be humorous about all this, saying airily that toughs of Leadville had sent down word that if he came up "they would be sure to shoot him or his traveling manager." He would say, "I wrote and told them that nothing that they could do to my traveling manager would intimidate me."

But at the time, Wilde was worried enough to ask a *Denver Times* reporter what kind of an audience he would have. He had read in the Denver newspapers the ominous reports that "a reception" was awaiting him, and that "a number of hard characters were to be introduced in the traditional costume of the Western 'bad man,' and that the Harvard students' prank was to be repeated."

Nobody could predict, for Wilde's benefit, exactly what he might expect. But everybody could be more certain about the wanton wealth he would see. The total value of Leadville's mining output in 1879 had been \$10,000,000 and in 1882 was more than \$18,000,000.

To the city had come sightseers galore, notables of the New and Old Worlds, for not since the days of California in 1849 had anything so sensational been known in mining. Marshall Field, the Chicago merchant, had made a fortune in Leadville when a "salted" mine, which he had bought, turned out not to be as fraudulent as had been thought

by the salesmen. A Philadelphia merchant, Guggenheim by name, recouped a lost fortune by buying a claim in Leadville.

From the high mountain town, rich men were swarming down upon Denver and out to the East. As a mining camp Leadville might be at the peak of production in ore, but in production of millionaires it had passed its prime. Its vitality was going into the city of Denver.

5

If Wilde was worried about his reception in Leadville, the one-hundred-and-fifty-mile railroad trip up the mountains brought him no cheer. Many a hardy mountaineer had been made seasick by "the thumpety-bump and lickety-split South Park mockery of a railroad" which carried him upward.

The day, Thursday April 13th, was gloomy and wet. Stronger characters than he had been plunged into moroseness by the damp cold which penetrated their bones on such days in the high Rockies, with the somber pines dripping mournfully and the snow banks gray and the whole world sodden.

Not on this day did the Rocky Mountain weather perform its miracle—the sudden lifting of the clouds, the saber swing of sunlight, the pines sparkling with millions of diamonds, and the snow banks, under blue skies, gleaming in immaculate white—the change that was so dazzling that it made the oldest and dourest prospectors burst into song.

As his train lurched through the storm, Wilde left the coach and tried to cheer himself by riding in the locomotive cab where orange flames under the boiler and warm Irish speech in the mouth of the engineer made him homesick for the cheery wood fires of England on a winter day.

Outside the cab window hung a gauze of drizzling snow through which the delicate gray trunks of bare aspen trees were etched on a background of gray silk mountainsides. But the Aesthete's eye caught only one thing of beauty—bluebirds—mites of color undaunted by a sullen world. As he watched them draw blue lines across the landscape, they heightened his nostalgia. "Oh, they are beautiful," he said, "almost as beautiful as kingfishers"—the kingfishers along the Thames at Oxford.

As the melancholy day drew toward its end, the train drew up at the snow-covered station at Leadville. There was no crowd to receive Wilde. His manager hurried him into a carriage and whirled off through the blinding snow to the Clarendon Hotel. In through the ladies' entrance, up the broad wooden stairway and into a room. Wilde

threw himself, panting, upon the bed in exhaustion and sent for a physician. It was wondered whether he was sick from the altitude, from the train, or from worry over the threatened "reception." The doctor



LEADVILLE MINERS

*"Miners at Foot of Shaft, Leadville, Colorado."* "Daily Graphic," New York, March 22, 1882.

came, examined the poet, decided it was "a case of light air" and prescribed accordingly. On the expense account which Wilde kept for presentation to D'Oyly Carte, went down "Prescription \$1."

But Wilde could not rest. In came a reporter from the *Leadville Herald* and Oscar, courteous as always, arose, "extended a cordial greeting" to the scribe, then "excused himself and again sought repose on

the couch.” The reporter watching him while he caught his breath saw that his attire was that of an ordinary traveling man, “by no means peculiar.”

As Wilde began to talk, the reporter decided he was not as “lah-de-dah” as he had supposed. “When he is fired by his love of art he does exercise some symptoms of genuine manhood. . . . He is an Irishman by birth, but bears more the imprint of his foster country, England, than of his native Emerald Isle.”

He was melancholy as he told the newsman, “I long to go back to sunny Italy, there to lie in my gondola, smoke cigarettes, and write poems. I love to travel and meet the best men and look at the best and most beautiful women so that when I die I will leave behind me a name that will be handed down to posterity as a lover of the beautiful.”

Time came for the lecture and again there was no crowd in the lobby to stare at him. Leadville was showing less curiosity than any other American town.

The Tabor Grand Opera House, “conceded by all to be the finest theater west of the Mississippi,” was not filled. Most of the audience was in evening clothes as it sat in what the Leadville papers proudly described as “the eight hundred celebrated opera chairs manufactured by Andrews and Company of Chicago.” As usual, Wilde was late and the audience grew weary of staring at the stage set in “a balcony scene prettily adorned with bric-a-brac.” No jokers, dressed as “traditional Western bad men,” nor Harvard students could be seen. One “aesthetic gentleman,” however, walked down the aisle and took a seat near the stage “after placing his hat, all covered with preserve can labels, near the footlights” showing that he had read the reputed poem of Wilde’s youth.

Eventually, then, Wilde “stumbled onto the stage with a stride more becoming a giant backwoodsman than an aesthete.” He was wearing his “low-necked knee pants costume” as expected, “his hair was parted at the equator” but there were no sunflowers and no lilies, “hence the audience was slightly disappointed.” He pitched his voice “at about middle C and inflected only when tired nature asserted itself by a long-drawn breath.” He began his well-learned lecture, stressing a fantastic flight in which he advised Leadville to study the Gothic school of Pisa where painters saw “brilliantly lighted palace-arches and pillars of marble and porphyry—noble knights with glorious mantles flowing over their mail, riding in the sunlight—groves of oranges and pomegranates, and through these groves the most beautiful women that the world had ever known, pure as lilies, faithful, noble, and intellectual.”

Leadville, with its mining camp architecture, pricked up its ears when Wilde said, "You paint your houses in the most horrible colors here in America," and again when in denouncing modern jewelry he added, "Gold has always been a rare thing in Europe, but for you gold is given in exhaustless measure. Gold is not given us, I think, for mere speculation. Don't leave your workman in gold in the background. Go to him and tell him what you like best in decoration and watch him as he draws it out in those magic threads of sunlight that are called gold wire. In this way you will encourage your workmen."

A new sentence urging America to set up an art school in the stately aisles of cypress forests with Gothic arches and hanging moss was interrupted by a Leadville voice—"We live in adobes in this country."

This earned the first applause of the evening.

A little later when he was saying, "There is no better way of loving nature than through art," a baby burst out crying. Wilde turned from his manuscript long enough to say, "I wish the juvenile enthusiast would restrain its raptures." The *Herald* reporter saw him smile broadly upon his audience and wait while "the youngster was being removed." Soon thereafter he ended the lecture to "applause similar to the desultory explosion of half a bunch of fire crackers."

The *Herald* reporter, taking down Wilde's speech with fullness, heard nothing at all about one subject which Wilde would soon afterward declare to have been a conspicuous part of his lecture. To British friends, Wilde would say that he had read the Leadville miners "passages from the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini and they seemed much delighted. I was reproved by my hearers for not having brought him with me. I explained to them that he had been dead for some little time, which elicited the enquiry, 'Who shot him?'"

Neither did anybody in Colorado know anything about still another matter which Wilde would soon be describing as typical of Leadville or, as he sometimes told it, Denver. Wilde invented the story that the week before he had arrived another lecturer had been shot by someone in the audience while turning his back on the crowd for the purpose of examining a chromo-lithograph. "Which shows," Oscar declared, "that people should never look at chromo-lithographs."

If Wilde was alarmed for his safety during the lecture he had shown no sign and, as he left the stage, Tabor's representatives met him with hospitable pleasantries and took him off to see the town and the Matchless Mine. The newspapermen hurried to their offices, many of them

preparing to do double duty, to write accounts of the lecture for their own newspapers in Leadville, and to file reports for the journals down in Denver, in order to satisfy tomorrow morning's curiosity over Oscar's fate in the richest and toughest town in the world. To the *Denver Tribune* went the word, “The lecture was well received . . . no attempts at interference . . . listened to attentively throughout . . . big snow storm, but large audience.” To the *Denver Times* went the statement that the *Leadville Herald* would declare “the most notable feature of Mr. Wilde's lecture was the rather boisterous good humor of the audience”—and this would prompt the *Times* to add, “Translated into everyday language, it probably means bad manners.”

Whatever the lecture had lacked in pleasure was soon forgotten by the lecturer. Hurrying to the hotel, where he changed his display costume for a slouch hat, corduroy coat, and long tight pants, he joined his guides. Nocturnal Leadville was awaiting him. Drunken carousers were on the wooden sidewalks; the sound of tipsy laughter echoed across dimly lighted streets. Down State Street, seven brass bands made discordant rivalry—seven brass bands blaring from the larger saloons and drowning out the tinkle of many pianos and the squeals of many girls.

The town was full of “palaces of pleasure”—The Little Casino, The Silver Thread, The Tudor, The Bon Ton, The Red Light, The Odeon. Printed signs and strong-voiced barkers cried the charms of theatrical adjuncts to the barrooms—small stages upon which it was promised “female bathers, daring tumblers and other dramatic attractions” would cavort. In the back rooms of all saloons, poker, faro, chuck-a-luck, twenty-one, were being played on green-topped tables under kerosene lamps that swung from the ceiling in veils of tobacco smoke.

Even Wilde's guides, with the weight of Tabor's name behind them, could not crowd their guest into some of the more popular beer halls.

They passed in and out of many saloons, many cafés. They tramped down further along the wooden sidewalks of State Street till they came to the lower-class dives where dead-drunk patrons lay along the walls beside miserable musicians whose eyes and fingers were heavy with liquor. They passed by if not through rows of cribs where prostitutes lured them with eye, word, and display both pedal and mammary. Wilde saw in the crib a Western institution of sin, a two-room shack with front almost all window and revealing a parlor garishly and cheaply furnished. Through a curtain or door could be glimpsed a bedroom with the couch stylishly covered with starched counterpanes and pillow shams.

Toward the end of the row of cribs was the French section, inhabited,

so it was boasted, by nothing but Parisiennes, those most artistic of sex venders. Wilde watched the dance hall girls, in short red skirts and swelling bosoms, persuading patrons to drink at the bar or at tables, to dance to the brass bands, and to spend money in other ways.

Among such women in the saloon of Pop Wyman, Oscar Wilde saw things that set his imagination and his wit racing. Over the piano, at which sat a bored musician, stood a sign, "DON'T SHOOT THE PIANIST; HE'S DOING HIS DAMNEDEST." Closer to the bar was a pulpit with a Bible chained to it, and on the wall was lettered the legend, "PLEASE DON'T SWEAR."

Through the din and smoke sauntered Pop Wyman himself, a genial host who as a boy had been a companion of Jim Fisk, the Eastern capitalist, stock-plunger, railroad-wrecker. Pop had come to the West years before and was now believed to be earning \$45,000 a year in his great saloon. It was whispered, not too quietly, that he had killed men in his time and that "he carried his small change in a purse fashioned from a human scrotum."

To the carousers of Leadville, Wilde, dressed in corduroy and sombrero, was nothing odd to look at, and his readiness at the bar and gaming tables proved very quickly "that there was no piousness in his nature." The miners approved his way of carrying his liquor. He was one of them.

It was between one and two o'clock in the morning before supper was discussed. Wilde's hosts suggested that they have it down in the Matchless Mine which was next on the sight-seeing tour. In Tabor's absence a certain McDonald, correspondent of a London newspaper, was doing the honors, and soon they were driving up the mountainside, far above the town, and looking down on the houses of revelry whose yellow lights made arabesque constellations upon the snowy plain.

At the mine Tabor's superintendent, Charles Pishon, bundled Wilde into Tabor's own underground suit, "a complete dress of India rubber." The *Denver Tribune* learned that this suit, "barring a certain goneness in the length of the pantaloon legs, fitted him quite too."

Wrapping the slack folds about him, Wilde drawled, "This cloak reminds me of the togas worn by Roman senators. The lining, however, should be of purple satin and there should be storks embroidered upon the flaps, with fern embroidering around the edges."

With much laughter, Wilde was loaded into an ore bucket in No. 3 shaft, the driest in the mine, and, holding for dear life to the rope, was lowered, while the superintendent, standing beside him, explained by lamp light the difference between this ore and that, high grade and low. Wilde said that it was odd such rich ores as these should look so com-

mon and somber. But Pishon thought him well pleased and heard him say several times that it was "the finest sight in the world."

At the bottom of the shaft he was "met by a dozen miners, each with a bottle. By invariable Western custom every bottle must make the rounds. Within a few minutes all have had twelve snorters. The miners



#### "THE AESTHETIC VS. THE MATERIAL"

"Showing what Oscar Wilde really does 'sit up with all night.'" The drawing which evidently inspired Orth Stein to write the verse that charged that Oscar Wilde's long hair was, in reality, a wig. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," January 21, 1882.

without exception are rather dizzy, but Wilde remains cool, steady, and collected. He is cheered loudly and is voted a perfect gentleman."

It was well toward dawn when the bucket brought Wilde to the surface, where he thanked Pishon gratefully, praised the mine, and went away showing neither fatigue nor intoxication. His hosts remembered that he had "chatted incessantly."

Wilde was driven to the Clarendon and a few hours of sweet dreams about a preposterous Leadville which would grow more preposterous as his dreams, his wit, his drinks, and his imagination played upon it. Soon he would be saying that when the Leadville miners had asked

him to supper, he had accepted and found it necessary "to descend a mine in a rickety bucket in which it was impossible to be graceful. Having got into the heart of the mountain, I had supper, the first course being whisky, the second whisky, and the third whisky."

Men less imaginative and less poetic than Wilde had gone away spinning wild tales of Leadville. Magnetic as it was, the noise of the booming camp threw distortions upon the memories of almost all men who had visited it. Wilde's mind, for example, played with the pianist in Pop Wyman's saloon, and soon he would be saying that as he stood contemplating that sign which asked patrons not to shoot the man, he had thought that here was recognition of the fact that "bad art merits death" and that if "the aesthetic applications of the revolver were already admitted in the case of music, my apostolic task would be much simplified." The sign, he decided, was "the only rational method of art criticism I have ever come across."

Someone had told him how two criminals had been hanged by vigilantes one night from steel ironwork in the half-finished court house at Leadville across the street from Tabor's Grand. On this his fancy was also working, and presently he told how the Leadville theater, where he lectured, was habitually used as a place for the execution of prisoners, and he recited how he had seen such an event. The convict had grasped the rope as he fell, started himself swinging from side to side and eventually had managed to reach the scenery uprights at the side of the stage. While he clung there, the cheering and applauding audience had fired revolvers at him.

Wilde also invented a tale of how Leadville used real criminals for villains in its stage plays and how when they wanted to produce *Macbeth* they advertised until they found "a lady just released from serving a term for poisoning."

## 7

Whisky and dreams tumbled Wilde's sleep for a few hours, then up he got and entrained for Colorado Springs where he was due to lecture in the evening—the evening of April 14th.

It was the most spectacular day's ride in his American tour so far, a trip down the slope of the Rockies, in and out of dripping valleys where the freshet streams splashed among granite boulders, where the rivers ran beside the train like hound pups with foam on their muzzles, leaping, disappearing, rounding into view again.

The clouds in Wilde's mind and in the Colorado sky were lifting simultaneously. He had won the miners of the toughest town in the

world. He was thinking how their dress was the most suitable for men, after all. The cowboy hat he had adopted as soon as he had come to the plains weeks before. The loose corduroys, the knotted neckerchief, the trousers tucked into high boots—a cavalier costume at base—yes, the best of all costumes for men.

Wilde had come to teach the miners about dress, and they had taught him. The aesthetic movement of London was suddenly very far away.

The train approached the rampart which divided the mountains from the plains. The engine crawled into the tortuous chasms of the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River, the track straddling stormy waters in an alley twisting through towering walls. The gigantic slabs still shone with rain and melted snow, but the sky, thousands of feet up, was blue.

The train creaked on through cañon walls, the dog still leaping and foaming at its side, then out of the alley, to coast down to the southern desert. Only one thing in Wilde's past could remind him even remotely of what he had seen—the time when he had come out of the St. Gotthard tunnel onto the shores of the Mediterranean. To the right and left now stood giant buttes with parallel escarpments. Here, under an Aegean sky, were Greek temples no human hands had built. Beyond rose the Great Plains, swelling with the natural contour of the world—a tawny ocean of grass on which clouds cast shadows large as continents.

“Perhaps the most beautiful part of the West,” Wilde would describe the Rockies, and the *Leadville Herald* was told that he had called the Royal Gorge the grandest scenery in the world. But he had been autobiographical when he had said that the mountains were too much for a poet. Something feminine in his artist's nature made him shrink from describing beauty on so vast and majestic a scale. He could sing of the Italian sky, the color of a flower, the brilliance of a jewel, the pattern of birds flying past a window, but there was nothing in his equipment to cope with the elements.

Since leaving London, three things had dwarfed his powers of description: the sea, Niagara, and the Rockies. After the first two he had made epigrams to cover his defeat, but about the shouldering magnificence of the cold, stone ranges he had no jokes, no witticisms.

The cities at the foot of the mountains were polite to Oscar. At Pueblo, Mrs. Churchill, the woman's rights agitator and editor of the *Antelope*, came aboard the train announcing herself as “the one whom

the State press has said would take the nonsense out of you." Onlookers were disappointed, for the lady smiled upon Wilde and left with no signs of having done anything but approve him.

Colorado Springs' four thousand five hundred citizens had been reading its *Daily Gazette's* promises that the lecturer would find, at its opera house, on the afternoon of April 14th, "one of the largest and most interesting audiences in the West." And "Let him not be disappointed" had been the civic cry. Local society entertained him, and the crowd at the matinee gave him "the closest attention," and applauded at the right places, but in numbers it had been so disappointing that the Denver editors had jeered. Colorado Springs, as the resort of so many affluent Easterners hunting health, had prided itself upon its culture, and it was angry to have rough, blatant Denver look down upon it. In self-defense, its *Gazette* replied that Oscar was not aesthetic enough for the population. The city would have turned out for Ruskin, but not for one who used aestheticism "as an advertising dodge."

The train carried Oscar back across the plains toward Denver, where on the evening of Saturday, April 15th, he was due to speak on "Interior and Exterior House Decoration as Applied to Our Modern Homes."

The *Tribune* had been doing what it could to attract business to the lecture, and its readers had given up hope that Eugene Field would write anything funny about his fellow-poet.

But to such a humorist as Field, the second coming of Oscar Wilde held possibilities. He would not write against the Aesthete, but his spirit could find other ways of expressing itself. And what it found to do was exposed on April 17th, by the rival *Republican*:

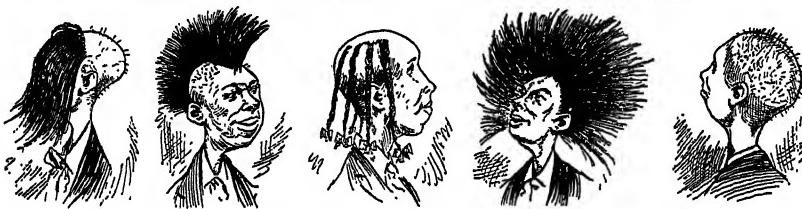
"There was a little side issue to Oscar Wilde's visit to Denver in the shape of a practical joke which was very amusing. The practical joker was Eugene Field, the managing editor of the *Tribune*, and he played it pretty low-down on the people of Denver.

"Mr. Rothacker had arranged to entertain Mr. Wilde with a ride around the city, after which he had proposed a dinner with a very select party at the Denver Club, but Mr. Wilde was delayed at Colorado Springs until too late for the ride. Mr. Locke, the advance agent of the divine Oscar, Mr. Field, and Mr. Kennicott were awaiting Mr. Wilde, with Mr. Rothacker holding the ribbons over an elegant team of blacks and an English drag, when the vexatious news reached them that their guest would not be on time. After discussing the question, Mr. Locke said, 'Let's fix up someone to represent Mr. Wilde.'

"The proposition was made in fun, but Mr. Field jumped at the chance for a huge joke and said 'Done.'

“In a few minutes a fur-trimmed overcoat was obtained, and a long-haired wig placed upon the bogus Oscar’s head. A few touches were added and the make-up was complete. The party climbed in and commenced to drive. Field posed in Oscar’s lackadaisical style, his head hanging limp to one side, resting on one hand, while he held a book in the other hand at which he gazed with a pathetic and dreamy expression. Kennicott furnished a wide-brimmed dark hat to the make-up, which was really fine. Everywhere the people gazed and caught on, to use a slang expression. The carriage drove slowly on, and not a smile

THE AESTHETIC APOSTLE AND WHAT HE MIGHT DO WITH HIS HAIR.



The might comb it over in front— or wear it a Cherokee— or braid it in nice little pigtails— or do the Circassian Girl in a bow— but perhaps the best thing would be to shave it off and sell it to a hair-mattress factory.

### COIFFEUR OF THE AESTHETE

*A cartoon in “Puck,” January 25, 1882.*

was cracked as the cry went up on every hand: ‘Here he is; that’s Oscar Wilde.’

“Windows were thrown up in residences, and servants and mistresses, reduced to a common level by curiosity, craned their heads out and gazed with awe upon Mr. Eugene Wilde, or whatever one is a mind to call it.

“A newsboy yelled, ‘Shoot Oscar,’ but the party maintained its composure. Several driving parties were met, and they turned round and joined the procession. Finally the drive was completed and the carriage drew up in front of the *Tribune* office, where a crowd of several hundred collected and crowded around the carriage. Mr. Skiff, the business manager, came out to be introduced to the distinguished guest, but, as he put out his hand, he ‘tumbled,’ to use another slang expression, and shied a broom at the fraud. This paralyzed the crowd, so to speak, and ended the fun. The general opinion is that Field played it pretty low-down on the inhabitants.”

Three days later Field made answer in characteristic fashion:

“The *Republican* is getting more and more unreliable every day. Its statement that gentlemen connected with the *Tribune* imposed a bogus

Oscar Wilde upon the people of Denver last Saturday afternoon [April 15th] is not only a gross misrepresentation of fact but an unprofessional snub of Mr. W. H. Stapleton, of the *News*, who perpetrated the practical joke. Mr. Stapleton will probably take up the cudgel in his own behalf through the columns of the *News* this morning."

For a day or so the town was puzzled, then men who best knew Field or who had recognized him on the famous ride, explained to everybody's satisfaction that Field was only spinning the joke further and further, involving innocent Mr. Stapleton, who knew better than to take up any cudgels against so resourceful a prankster.

## 9

Mr. Stapleton had on his *News* all the eccentricities he could care for, one of them indeed being a rival in whimsicalities of Field himself.

This was Orth Stein, who had just resigned from the city editorship of the *Leadville Chronicle* and come down to report for the *Denver News*. Carlyle C. Davis, one of the owners of the *Chronicle*, said of him that "his peer as a reporter has never yet been born," but that he would invent news most outrageously. Davis had brought Stein west from Lafayette, Indiana, knowing that the distinguished political Hoosier, Godlove S. Orth, was his grandsire. Landing in Leadville, Stein had begun a great newspaper crusade before reaching the *Chronicle* office. On his way from the railroad station he had decided all Leadville physicians were quacks, had obtained the evidence, had an exposé in the next day's paper, and soon had the Legislature investigating.

Sitting at his desk he invented wild stories, such as the discovery of a battleship on a lonely peak named Battle Mountain. For the sake of a sensation he perfected a gallows that would go up instead of dropping men down, jerking off their heads rather than throttling them. He was maneuvering to surprise the sheriff and two condemned men, Rosecrantz and Gilbert, when the official discovered the trick and killed the story which Stein felt would have been his masterpiece.

After one look at Oscar Wilde, when that lecturer did arrive, Stein hurried away confident that what he could invent about the Aesthete would be better than facts.

It was in verse that he gave *News* readers the picture of how he had gone, trembling, to Oscar's door and looked at the great man:

Long and thin is the form within  
That rests in the easy chair,

And he counts his pelf, while high on the shelf  
Is a wig of flowing hair.  
No cut-off pants adorn his leg,  
But hang on the wall on a humble peg.

A dressing gown warm encircles his form,  
He holds a pipe in his hand;  
Softly, says he, “What fools they be,  
In this semi-civilized land.  
They think that I live on sunflower seed—  
An Irish stew is more what I need.”

The fiction that Wilde's long hair was only a wig had begun with a cartoon in *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* soon after the poet had landed.

By the time Wilde did arrive back in Denver, it was late, and with Rothacker weary from waiting, the public was never sure whether the dinner at the Denver Club ever came off as planned.

The lecture itself was, according to all the newspapers, “more slenderly attended” than the first, although Manager Bush had extended himself to furnish the stage of Tabor's Grand with even more aesthetic taste. There were fewer flowers and much “genuine Turkish upholstery, luxurious plush, and raw silk curtains—an absence of sentimental delicacy, and, instead, the semblance of utility and comeliness in substantial form.”

The *Tribune* reporter saw Wilde enter without appearing to observe these surroundings and walk languidly to the center of the stage as if wearied by “his continuous traveling and talking, together with the effect of Colorado's rarefied atmosphere.” The newsmen who had read the lecture in Eastern and Western papers caught new sentences here and there:

“Do not paper a house. There is always too much of the sensation of living in a paper box. . . . The hat-rack is one of those beastly inventions that rank with the customs of crime and the terrors of the cross. . . . Photographs are always libelous; they are ridiculous pretences; they should be kept only in portfolios to show friends whose friendship is not treacherous. . . . There is nothing more indicative of moral decline than squalor and indifference to dress.”

People in the audience blinked a little at the last of these declarations, thinking of many of the nation's great men who had been indifferent to dress—Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, for instance. And of how little moral decline there had been among the pioneers of the midland and the West who had thrived in squalor.

The *News'* representative heard Wilde call women's bonnets "horrible monstrosities," and say that the "great central truth that underlies the aesthetic movement seems to be this: that art has in modern times become too modern and conventional and that the struggle of the new school is practically the same struggle that Dickens and others of the humanitarian school have waged against conventional teachings in morality and theology." He heard Wilde advise the rich to build houses of marble, and the less rich to build them of red brick. "If you have wooden houses, paint them in pretty colors and don't have them look either somber or ghostly. . . . On a plain wooden table a cold marble slab is horrible. . . . Builders of houses should not make such horribly large windows. Rooms are not built simply for the purpose of looking out into the street. By using stained glass more freely and cutting your windows into smaller planes, a better blending of sunlight and shade will be affected. . . . Don't cover your floors with carpets. They collect dust and are very unhealthy. It is better to have part of the floor covered with rugs. . . . In your statues of great men, if you dress the figure according to the style of time, you must put on him a tall hat, a pair of long pants, a buttoned-up frock coat, and stick an umbrella under his arm. . . . There never was an age that needed the ministrations of art more than this cold, avaricious, selfish age. . . . Art if rightly used will pave the way for a sort of universal brotherhood of man."

The *Republican* reporter understood Wilde to say that "American publishers issue their books in all colors. They are enough to kill any person who has an artistic eye. If these bindings cannot be concealed, the books should be covered with a curtain."

As it ended, the lecture, all agreed, reached a contagious peak of spirit. Wilde hurried to the train.

An hour after he had gone an unknown man, "wearing brass knucks," hit Orth Stein at the corner of Blake and Fifteenth streets." Stein, when he had recovered sufficiently to talk, denounced James Connors, the same officer who had arrested Minnie Clifford for wearing sunflowers. He said Connors had stood within forty feet of the assault and done nothing. Connors, when quizzed on this, said he thought it only "a friendly scuffle," but when he heard Stein's full strictures upon him, he inserted a card in the *Republican* on the 18th saying, "Although Leadville officers may be in the habit of shooting men for slugging such men as Stein, I am not prepared to go to Canon City [the penitentiary] just yet." He gave it as his theory that Stein had been out with a lady trapeze performer from the Tivoli Theater, and had been waylaid by her husband.

Wilde's departure left the newspapers still busy with his name and fame. The *News* on the 19th was issuing a long ode to Oscar, describing how "Tabor can knock the silly socks off thee in winding up the lyric muse" and continuing:

No, Oscar, what we love thee for is thy  
Magnific gall and triple-tempered cheek  
On which we drivers of the quill do gaze  
With wonder.

H. Ornauer, the aesthetic tailor, published an advertisement purporting to relate how Wilde had "returned from Leadville by telegraph to be fitted for a suit of clothes to be finished in time for his lecture. He openly declared Ornauer to be the best tailor in the world and said that hereafter Ornauer only could make his clothes."

Not to be outdone, the Pioneer Billiard Hall in Leadville published in the *Herald* a fictitious dispatch from Denver narrating how four minutes after he had begun his lecture last Saturday night, Wilde was led from the stage by the sheriff of Arapahoe on the charge of obtaining money under false pretenses, leaving an audience of eleven small boys, who had peddled bills, and two deaf women, to go away without having their curiosity satisfied." And how at two o'clock in the night a band of masked men had entered the jail, collared Wilde and "hung him to the old cottonwood tree" because Wilde had, while visiting Leadville, "failed to visit the Pioneer Billiard Hall and drink some of their two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old Tom and Jerry. This place is at 118 West State Street and all salesmen are acquainted with the interior perfectly."

Eugene Field was writing for the *Tribune* of the 19th, "The *Leadville Chronicle* seems to be laboring under the impression that Oscar Wilde made a night of it with the Denver press gang upon his return to this port last Saturday. Wilde left here at half-past ten Saturday night, and the only night he made of it was out on the barren plains on the rickety Union Pacific track that runs between Wynkoop and Kansas City."



## B O O K F O U R

*EASTWARD, SOUTHWARD, NORTHWARD*

### I

#### SUNFLOWERS IN KANSAS

"DOCTHUR WILDSON DEER SUR—

"I have pade taxes in Kansas City for 14 years and I never smelt such a stink in my life. Some damned nager has stuck a ded horse under my noze. I want you to move that plug away from my door. If yous dont attend to this enny the devil wid ya.

"Yours with much luv,

"JAMES MULVANEY."

This letter to the City Board of Health had been printed in the *Kansas City Times* on July 18, 1880, and now, two years afterward, odors scarcely more sweet were awaiting Oscar Wilde's aesthetic nostrils. As the horse and mule market of the West, Kansas City had trouble disposing of animal carcasses. Virtually surrounded by three sluggish rivers, the Missouri, the Kaw, and the Blue, the town had its feet in flat bottoms where stagnant water stood for much of the year.

Outwardly the spectacle was substantially what it had been in 1880 when a native had described it as "a sight to make granite eyes shed tears. Missouri hogs, not yet having fear of packing houses, patrolled the streets. At night, when the hogs were off duty, a billion frogs in the green ponds at the bottom of the choicest unoccupied city lots told their troubles to the stars, and saluted the morning sun with croaks of despair. In wet weather the town site was a sea of mud and in dry weather a desert of dust. There was no paving, the drainage was poor.

"A miserable breed of street cars, drawn by dissolute mules over a drunken track, furnished the only means of street transportation by rail. The water supply made whisky-drinking a virtue, and the gas was not of much better use than to be blown out. The population of the city included as fine a collection of the ruffian brotherhood and sister-

hood of the Wild West as could well be imagined. Renegade Indians, demoralized soldiers, unreformed bushwhackers and border ruffians, thieves and thugs imported from anywhere, professional train robbers, and all kinds of wrecks of the Civil War gave the town something picturesquely harder to overcome than the hills and gulches of its topography."

Tremendous forces were at work, however, to correct this. The energy which had turned the city from a frontier collection of shacks, holding less than 5,000 people in 1860, into a fiercely commercial assemblage of 55,000 by 1880, would not long tolerate bad streets and men.

Less than a quarter of a century before Oscar Wilde entered it, Kansas City had been merely the northern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail—in reality Kansas City had been a suburb of Westport where the wagons outfitted for their prodigious trek into the Southwest. Here the cattlemen had come with their steer-herds, their Mexican and Indian hangers-on, their hard-drinking cowboys. In and out of the flimsy village, during Civil War days, Confederate guerillas, notably the horrendous Quantrill, flanked by "Bloody Bill" Anderson, Cole Younger and the James brothers, had ridden, shooting at equally desperate militia men. Its trade killed, its name as muddy as its streets, Kansas City had emerged from the war apparently resigned to be an inconspicuous neighbor of those prosperous cities, Leavenworth and St. Joseph. But its citizens had persuaded railroad magnates to give it the great bridges which had been planned for Leavenworth and other towns, and by the middle Seventies it had established itself as the trade center for the black loam farmers of Kansas and as railroad center for the mining tonnage which was pouring eastward out of Denver. In 1880 Jay Gould had terminated curious railroad dealings by making the city his base of Western operations; in 1882 the Missouri Pacific Railroad was finished to Omaha, bringing to Kansas City the richest of Nebraska's products, and in the same year the Burlington tracks were opened to Denver, carrying added trade back to Missouri.

The 13,000 hogs which Kansas City had slaughtered in 1869 seemed incredible now in 1882 when 750,000 would go into the many packing plants which, it was hoped, would soon overtake Chicago's. Livestock poured through town, headed East to the midlands for feeding. The city had grown 72 per cent in the decade between 1870 and 1880. Real estate skyrocketed up, up, up.

Kansas City was ready to show Oscar Wilde the newest prodigy in American cities, one built upon a soldier basis than Denver's, since it was being fed by agriculture and industry, farms and factories both—a creature of the railroads as Chicago, twenty years earlier, had been.

One of the most powerful up-pushing forces in Kansas City in April, 1882, was a human one—a fat man named William R. Nelson, called “Colonel” by courtesy. He understood Kansas City. He had had a rough and tumble youth himself. Unruly as a little boy, he had, in his teens, been given up as a bad job by those expert disciplinarians, the priests of Notre Dame, Indiana. They had sent him home to Fort Wayne where his Protestant father thought nothing more, now, could be done.

As a young man, Nelson had failed raising cotton on the Sea Islands, had come home to make a fortune in street contracting, lost it through the failure of a partner, bought the *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, worked in politics, then in two years, deciding that Indiana was too slow for him, had sold the paper and started West in 1880 to seek his fortune on the plains. Denver sounded good, but he never got past Kansas City. Many things about the booming town attracted him; one was the bad streets. It was in wood block paving that he had made the ill-starred fortune back in Indiana. He knew that business.

So he started the *Kansas City Star* in September of that year, and began crusading for winding boulevards, parks, better and better paving, ever spurring the city to lift itself out of the mud. Passionately devoted to civic betterment, and generally agreed to be uncompromisingly honest, he was seemingly on the road to great power not only in Kansas City, but in the West when, in the dawn of April 17th, he sent one of his reporters down to the Union Depot to meet Oscar Wilde. Colonel Nelson liked art and wanted Kansas City to have museums of paintings some day.

Into the huge station which had been finished four years before, the reporter came, and headed straight for the Santa Fe train, the 5:30, which was due from Denver. To Conductor Smith, as he alighted, the newsman asked, “Have you got Oscar Wilde on board?”

“No,” came the short answer. “At least if I have I don’t know it, and it’s a good thing for him too.”

“Why?”

“Because if I had him and knew it, I’d have drowned the damned fool in the Kaw River before he got here.”

The reporter then discovered that Wilde was arriving on the Union Pacific, and he hurried out to board the train at the Hickory Street stop so that he might quiz his prey before rival reporters appeared.

To the Negro of the one sleeping coach, the on-clambering seeker put his question.

"'Yes, sah. We've got him,' said the porter, opening up his yellow face like one of Oscar's Pet Sunflowers.

"'He's down dar in the middle berth. See dat man wid de long harr and de big cloak and de piles o' little sacks and bags? Dat's him, suah!'"

Oscar was "contentedly reading a copy of a morning paper, his much-talked-of legs calmly resting across the cushion of the opposite seat. Beside him stood his secretary, a dapper little man with the snap and brusqueness of a professional show manager, and a colored servant. Wilde was dressed in the civilized costume of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the large cloak which is made and worn in imitation of Tennyson. He had on a black slouch hat, a coat and vest of dark cloth, light trousers of Scotch goods, and a pair of shoes with extremely pointed toes, *à la* the regulation English snob. The Tennysonian cloak was thrown over one shoulder and under the opposite arm, and a large silk scarf of the shade of old gold was folded about his neck, hiding the aesthetic collar, which probably occupied its proper place on his person."

As the reporter introduced himself and took a seat, Wilde's secretary briskly demanded, "Have you a copy of the *Evening Star* with you?"

The reporter hadn't and noted that a pile of papers "covered the seat adjoining and all had evidently been carefully perused and clipped for scrap-book purposes."

Wilde quickly opened up with a laudatory description of Colorado and California and then began pumping the reporter about Kansas City. "He was greatly surprised when told that Kansas City was in Missouri and not in Kansas, and that its population numbered eighty thousand souls, exclusive of the festive Chinaman whose color makes him aesthetic whether he will or no."

Oscar wanted to know what the word "Kansas" meant. The reporter answered that it was Indian, but he couldn't say more. Topeka, the capital of Kansas, however, meant "Small Potatoes"; Oscar seemed pleased.

As they drew into the depot Wilde was "still descanting upon the beauties of California" and as "the distinguished clown" passed into his room at the Coates House, "a group of lady boarders and housemaids, who had taken up a position in the hall, were heard to whisper, 'Isn't he too utterly beautiful. Too awfully too.'"

Colonel Nelson might want art for Kansas City, but he had decided that Oscar Wilde was not Rubens, for on the second page of his paper, which printed the reporter's experience, he inserted a note, "Oscar

Wilde, the long-haired what-is-it, has finally reached Kansas City, and the aesthetic noodles and blue china nincompoops are in the seventh heaven of happiness."

All morning Wilde remained in his room, receiving callers, then, in the afternoon, he hired a hack and set off to see the town and to find



### SCHOOL BUILDING

*Type of public school building common in the Missouri River valley and upper Mississippi Valley in 1882. "History of the State of Kansas,"*

*A. T. Andreas, 1883.*

Colonel George W. Warder, "the bard of Kansas City," who in the *Sunday Times* had published a long poem, "A Greeting to Oscar Wilde," which ran for stanza after stanza praising beauty:

O! the beautiful in beauty! O! the loveliness in love!  
 O! the sweetness of suggestion in fair Venus and her dove,  
 In the wisdom of Pallas, in a Juno's grace and mien,  
 In the strength of Jove's deep thunder, in the smile of Luna's sheen  
 As she bends to brave Endymion sleeping on the moonlit hills  
 Till she lifts his drooping fancies, and her love his bosom fills.

Colonel Warder had worked up aesthetically to his climax in the ninth stanza:

If thou gatherest truth like flowers, kind and gladsome as a child  
True and brave in spirit, then I greet you, Oscar Wilde.

Downtown a reporter for the *Kansas City Times* caught up with Wilde and was told, "I am looking for Colonel Warder, your poet. He writes excellent poetry." Two of the stanzas, said Wilde, "show deep thought." The reporter noted that "in his street attire, Oscar Wilde appeared simply a robust, affable, and ingenuous young man."

In a Kansas City barber shop a *Times* reporter was hearing one customer say, "What's his subject?" and another answer, "The English Re-nay-sance."

"What's Re-nay-sance?" persisted the first citizen.

"Statuary."

The Coates Opera House held only "a little cluster" of patrons when Wilde came upon the stage in his knee breeches. A circus was in town, and "a large proportion of local aesthetes had gone over to the East Side to see Zazel fired out of a cannon."

The *Times'* critic thought Wilde's speech, which he had changed to "Art Decoration," "forcible"; the *Journal's* editorial writer thought it "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and trash signifying nothing. . . . Everything is spoiled by the man's affectation. . . . The address lacked spirit and sensation of any sort. It left not a ripple on anybody's mind. . . . There are some things so infernal bad that they are good, and Mr. Wilde's lecture is one of these things."

The *Journal's* reporter was impressed by Wilde's monotonous shifting of weight from one leg to the other, and how "later in the evening he held in his hand a handkerchief and toyed with it as does a bashful maiden. When not holding either his watch-charm or handkerchief, his hand played with his coattail. This he bobbed up and down like a frisky lamb does its caudal appendage when running in a field. . . . Throughout the delivery, one was reminded of a college lad scanning stanzas of Vergil."

Next morning Oscar Wilde awakened to find it cloudy. Moreover, there was no need to hurry to St. Joseph, Missouri, where he was to speak that evening. He had better wait, go up on the afternoon train, and reach there just before it was time to speak.

Bob Ford and his brother, Charlie, had gone into the St. Joe court

yesterday, April 17th, and pleaded guilty to the murder of Jesse James. In the two weeks that had passed since the betrayal of the great outlaw, an element in St. Joe had been saying the Ford boys should be killed. Bob Ford was a dirty little coward. Soon farmboys, hoboes, schoolchildren, would be singing:

Oh, the people held their breath  
When they heard of Jesse's death,  
And wondered how he ever come to die.  
'Twas one of the gang, called little Robert Ford,  
Who shot poor Jesse on the sly.

The St. Joe judge had listened to the Ford boys' plea of guilty, had accepted it and sentenced them to be hanged in thirty days. But the brothers had gone back grinning to their cells. They knew something, and everybody knew what it was. Governor Crittenden had hired them to kill Jesse James, had defied all criticism, had told reporters from all parts of the country that he had no apologies.

At noon on the 18th the pardon came to the jail. The Fords "shook hands warmly with their jailers" and stepped out free men. As they came through the jailhouse door, a hand fell on Bob's shoulder. Sheriff Trigg of Ray County said, "I arrest you for the murder of Wood Hite," a cousin of Jesse's, and one of the gang. But Bob and Charlie were sure the Governor would never see them hanged for anything in the past.

St. Joe was angry, but there were too many tourists and sight-seers pouring into town to see the little white James house, for a lynching party to form. Photographers and publishers were dogging the footsteps of the Widow James, and people who knew her lack of funds were telling her she ought to sell her pictures and write a life of her famous man.

People were making a town boy, Alvah Patee Clayton, tell over and over his experience with Jesse James. A few days ago, Alva had received a watch on his twenty-first birthday, and had been showing it to the boys who loafed in Wank's bakery in Pateetown, one of the town's districts. The boys had said to him, "You'll get held up, Alvah, goin' home."

An older man with smiling eyes and quiet ways—a relative newcomer to the gang that loafed in Wank's bakery—had said, "I'll take you home," and on the way had pointed to some bushes, saying, "What'd you do if Jesse James jumped out of there?" Alvah, remembering how everybody said Jesse had killed fifty men, had gasped, "I'd die!" whereupon his protector had slapped his thigh in mirth. He was still smiling as Alvah looked back from his front door and saw him standing

on the horseblock under the gaslights. But he was not smiling when Alvah next saw him. That was when Alvah, and the other loafers from Wank's, crowded into the undertaker's to see dead Jesse James. The corpse on the cooling-board was that of Alvah's guardian.

Jesse had a wife  
To mourn all her life;  
His children they were brave.  
But the dirty little coward  
That shot Mr. Howard  
Has laid Jesse James in his grave.

## 4

The afternoon of April 18th, the editor of St. Joe's *Evening News* remembered other things than Bob Ford, and inserted in his columns:

"Oscar Wilde will not arrive until seven o'clock this evening. He intended to come up on the 1:30 train this afternoon but he was too comfortably ensconced in the sky room of the Coates House, where he had a magnificent view of the heavy clouds. He concluded not to come until the darkness had taken the place of the daylight, when he could close his eyes and think of the beautiful."

"Oscar is a curiosity and will have to be seen to be appreciated. He will lecture tonight on 'Art Decoration.' Oscar has some peculiar ideas. For instance, he says it is entirely out of place for men to post their advertisements upon billboards, fences, windows, etc."

"There will be a big crowd at the opera house tonight, not to hear the lecture, but to see the little fool who has cheek enough to run around among women with breeches coming down only to his knees."

There was far from a big crowd at the opera house, however, when Oscar Wilde came to it from the train. The *St. Joseph Herald* said it was "very slim," the *Gazette* said it was "small," the *Evening News* thought it "fair and intelligent considering the inclemency of the weather." Back in Kansas City the *Evening Star* heard Oscar had spoken "to empty benches."

The next day, the *Evening News* demolished him physically and mentally: "His head is pyramidal and tapers almost to a point. He does not understand the genius of American trade and swap, which figures that its cash dividends accumulate as rapidly in an unadorned structure as in the beautifully tessellated and chiseled palace. Our craftsmen are as ingenious as the world possesses. . . . If our masonry was to be executed according to Mr. Wilde's idea, it would take the

craftsmen of the world a generation to have built up our new Chicago.

As Wilde read this he could have realized that from this Missouri River critic he was receiving the most completely honest and candid answer that native America had given him so far. In that Missouri



### OPERA HOUSE

*Jay's Opera House, Emporia, Kansas, is typical of the theaters and halls in which Oscar Wilde spoke in many small cities in America.*

*From "History of the State of Kansas," A. T. Andreas, 1883.*

voice the pioneer, the frontiersman, the nature-lover and the Philistine were all speaking, particularly the Philistine, unafraid and unapologetic, naïve and bumptious, but magnificently candid, as the writer continued:

"While the modern style of architecture may not be so beautiful and ornate as the antique, it yet displays great mechanical skill, and marvelous power of invention: and no man of taste and genius can fail to recognize and appreciate its proud magnificence and perceive that as

a system it is as complete and durable as the Greek and medieval. . . . Mr. Wilde even found fault with the jewelry of our women, while there were ladies in his presence more beautifully adorned than were Andromache, Dido, or Beatrice.

"Mr. Wilde was evidently not intended for this world. He is an exotic growth."

## 5

Crossing the Missouri River, Wilde spent three evenings in Kansas' most populous section, the fertile farm lands of the Missouri and Kaw river bottoms. This had been "Bleeding Kansas" not thirty years before, the rehearsal stage for the Civil War, and, as such, the object of intense interest in England, particularly in the wife of Lord Byron.

But for either the historic ground or its British tradition, Wilde had no interest.

At the new opera house in Leavenworth on the evening of Wednesday, April 10th, a few curious people, including "a delegation" from the fort near by, assembled, listened to Wilde speak of decorative art, and when it was over, dispersed, as the *Kansas City Times* understood, "without any applause." The receipts, according to the reporter, were \$60.

That Leavenworth's 16,000 people had been so cool, augured poorly for Topeka's 15,000, who were next. But Topeka, as the State capital, regarded itself as more progressive; said, indeed, that Leavenworth was at heart still the tough river town it had been in the 1850's, a town dominated by a less energetic Southern strain, while Topeka, settled originally by New Englanders, was alert and aggressive.

To the Windsor Hotel, where Wilde took rooms after arriving in Topeka on the afternoon of the 20th, came a reporter from the *Capital*, to discover the famous Aesthete able to express himself "in a very lucid manner, much contrasted with the soulful utterances of his burlesquers."

Wilde told him, "When I landed in New York and read what the newspapers had to say about me, I thought I was about to travel in an extensive lunatic asylum, but when I went out in society there, I found the most charming cosmopolitan people I ever had the pleasure of meeting. The newspapers are far from representing the true public opinion of the American people on art questions. I have met as intelligent, appreciative, sympathetic people on my travels as in the highest art and social centers of England.

"In England, all society and all art is centered in one city, London, and in a very small part of that city, and to me the society of a large provincial city like Manchester is simply unbearable. In your country

there is no similar center, but all over the country I find an element appreciative and intellectual. 'Rough' is an unfortunate adjective for Americans to apply to themselves. There can be nothing useful which is not beautiful, and if ugly, it may be put down as of imperfect usefulness."

He thought the present generation "a most impractical one," and he explained that by impractical, he meant "that they lived without making life worth living for—without any cultivation of the sense of pleasure, the beautiful.

"To me the life of the businessman who eats his breakfast early in the morning, catches a train for the city, stays there in the dingy, dusty atmosphere of the commercial world, and goes back to his house in the evening, and after supper to sleep, is worse than the life of the galley slave—his chains are golden instead of iron."

The critic discovered how Wilde had altered and condensed his stock paragraph about education into an epigram: "You give the criminal calendar of Europe to your children under the name of history."

## 6

Lawrence was next, historic Lawrence, whose leaders in the Territorial days had called it "the center of the garden spot of the world," where the climate of Italy was duplicated in the Kaw River bottoms.

Rain was in the air, however, as Oscar lectured on the evening of April 21st. The audience was "comparatively small," and while it listened respectfully, agreeing with him that homes certainly should be more attractive, it would like to have known, in the words of the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, "what it ought to do. If we are to discard all these things, with what will we replace them?"

Wilde came to Atchison through the rain. Its streets were full of yellow mud. The budding trees of the hillsides were hidden in mist.

Up and down the sullen streets all afternoon a "dilapidated little burro" had been led, "wearing on either side a large placard with the words, 'I lecture at Corinthian Hall tonight.'" A sunflower between his drooping ears told everybody who he was. He seemed to be ashamed of himself.

For a long time thirty people waited in Corinthian Hall that night to welcome Oscar Wilde. They watched, as did the critic of the *Atchison Champion*, heavy-footed boys, "who, acting as ushers, clanked about, lighting the footlights with a piece of burning paper, opening and shutting the stage door and making mysterious journeys back and forth." The most depressing thing about the preliminaries was "the high-pitched

wailing notes of the young gentleman of British extraction who took tickets at the door, and who seemed, as his voice drifted in at intervals when the door was opened, bewailing the barbarousness of the ‘blawsted country.’”

As they waited, people began to say Wilde would never speak to so thin a house, but just as they had decided “to add to the suffering of the mourning Briton at the gates by demanding their money back,” the curtain rose and revealed “a bare, cold, cheerless, inartistic, and generally dreadful light stand, and a moment after, the apostle of the beautiful hove in sight.”

The thirty patrons were disappointed. The *Champion’s* reporter observed “as the sunflower failed to beautiful the burro, so Mr. Wilde’s aesthetic clothes failed to call up before his audience any image save that of some vender of a corn-salve or eye-water.”

“Having seen Mr. Wilde and heard him, we withdraw from the position heretofore taken, that he is a pronounced and irreclaimable and gorgeous-colored and rainbow-hued ass; yet his theories are idle; his thirteenth-century talk is historically incorrect, all the palaces of variegated marble and the Gothic cathedrals did not prevent the Italians of that time from being treacherous, sensual, revengeful, and generally despicable, and mankind is not to be raised to the fit companionship of angels by wood-carving nor painting in water colors.”

The small audiences and the spring rains left Wilde in no especial fondness for Kansas. A little later to English friends he would tell how he had received a telegram from Griggsville, Kansas, asking him to lecture to it on aesthetics.

“I replied, ‘Begin by changing the name of your town.’”

He still felt pleased about his whole American tour, so far. At least he talked so to a representative of the *Manchester Examiner* who, while touring the New World, met his fellow-Britisher in Kansas. To his paper, back at home, the Manchester man wrote, “Mr. Wilde told me the demand for his photographs has exceeded any possible supply. He said that in New York he had had a reception such as in England is rarely given a prince. He spoke enthusiastically of the kindness of Western towns, notably Cincinnati, Chicago, San Francisco, and told me that in the West people traveled long distances and waited weary hours at railway stations to see him pass. He was compelled when fatigued to show himself on the platform.

“He gave me a remarkable illustration of a Californian’s detestation

of horse-stealing. Murder, they look on as a fine art, but the horse-thief is universally loathed. Wilde said that in California he had dined with a gentleman who had fired eleven shots at a predatory poet, and could not be convinced he had been guilty of want of respect for literature in so doing. Wilde said he had had no more attentive audiences than the miners at Leadville. He intends to lecture in Australia or New Zealand and to stay two months in Japan."

As Oscar Wilde wound his way across the valleys of the Missouri, the Mississippi, and the Ohio in the springtime, he unfolded the newspapers which his secretary had bought to clip —current papers, back issues . . . piles of newspapers. . . .

April 1, Cincinnati: Lady Wilde receives "Intellects" every Saturday in a darkened room at her London home. The room is dimly lighted by rose-shaded lamps. Oscar's elder brother Willy is the soul of entertainment, chatting learnedly to one and another and giving, when requested, imitations of Irish life and dialect.

April 5, Cincinnati: A preserving company telegraphed Mrs. Samuels, mother of the late Jesse James, offering \$10,000 for her son's body, with a percentage of receipts from exhibition. Told her she could make \$10,000 in less than two years. The same company tried to get Guiteau's body.

April 11, London: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of original members of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" is dead, aged fifty-four. Most of his poems came to him in bed.

April 14, New York: Marshal T. H. Richie of St. Jos., Mo., here; says Frank James was at Jesse's funeral. Many good citizens recognized him but would not give him away to the law. Richie says when



ROBERT FORD

*"The dirty little coward  
Who shot Mr. Howard."*

Engraving from a photograph of Robert Ford who assassinated Jesse James while the latter was living in seclusion under the alias Thomas Howard. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," April 21, 1882.

news came that Jesse was shot, he sent one of his best men to the house. Man, looking things over, picked up a purse in room where body lay. Seven-year-old son of dead Jesse told policeman to put it down and when policeman paid no attention, picked up a revolver, cocked it, aimed it and said, "That's my mamma's, damn you; put it down!" Richie adds, "Wasn't he a chip off the old block?"

April 18, Chicago: The great department store of A. T. Stewart, Croesus of New York merchants, has failed under the bad management of Mr. Hilton, who was prejudiced against Jews in unreasonable manner. A stronger reason for the failure is New York's inability to compete with Chicago in the wholesale trade.

April 18, Washington: Colonel Ingersoll has accepted an offer of \$100,000 to spout infidelity in one hundred lectures.

April 19, St. Joseph, Mo.: At his funeral Jesse James had a \$500 coffin, two preachers to officiate, and the choir sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

April 19, Washington: John W. Guiteau, brother of the condemned assassin, is quarreling with Charles over rights to the book the latter is writing about himself to be published after his death.

April 21, Washington: Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll charges Reverend De Witt Talmage with untruth. "Talmage says I was defeated for Governor of Illinois because I was an infidel, and that I am an infidel because I was defeated for Governor of Illinois."

April 20, London: Charles Darwin is dead. He was born in 1809.

April 23, Boston: Ralph Waldo Emerson is dying.

April 24, New York: Mark Twain recently introduced Charles Dudley Warner at a dinner, saying, "As my fellow citizen I respect him, but as my neighbor whose turnip patch adjoins mine, I watch him."

April 26, London: Henry M. Stanley, who started up the Congo in 1879, is still at it.

April 27: The Jews are being massacred in Russia.

April 27, Chicago: The influence of London styles is being seen in men's clothes for spring. The distinctively American style of broad trousers and long coats is passing.

April 28, Boston: Emerson died last evening.

April 28: The Chinese exclusion bill is being voted on in Washington. It is sure to pass.

May 2: Edison says he will drive out illuminating gas in ten years and have a section of New York's streets lit in two months. He says his company has lights in two hundred places in America, and in Milan, Finland, Strasbourg, as well as other places in Europe. One whole area is now lit in London.

May 2: A telephone line will soon go into effect between Buffalo and New York.

May 2: General Sheridan, head of the army, is rushing troops under General Crook into Arizona and New Mexico to stop the massacre of ranchers by Indians.

May 3: No one says "callow youth" any more. Everyone simply says "He is vealy."

## 2

### "ADDS A NEW HORROR TO DEATH"

BEAU BRUMMELLS of Piccadilly would have been amazed if they had seen what their friend Oscar Wilde was doing on the afternoon of May 2nd. He was examining the architecture of a new Presbyterian church in Dayton, Ohio—a city quite unknown to London aesthetes.

As a connoisseur of churches Oscar had never been rated highly, but Dayton was eager to get his opinion, and he was happy to oblige. Did not the star writer of the *Daily Democrat* hail him as "perhaps the greatest living art critic" and "a man of almost unequaled taste and aesthetic judgment"? Thus pedestaled, surely he must go along with Professor Isaac Broome and others of Dayton's art element to inspect, not only the church, but various examples of the city's search for beauty.

Surrounded by anxious art-lovers, Oscar cast an eye upon the religious building, inside and out. "It is really quite excellent," said he. "I am surprised." He looked carefully at the front. "These polished granite columns are beautiful. They should not have been both alike, however; one of them of red Scotch granite would have afforded so charming a contrast." They went inside, and Oscar looked around. The frescoing drew no criticism, but the stained glass windows! "I do not like them," said the critic; and faces fell. "Why were they made with so transparent a design and such flaring colors?" There were apologies. The art of stained glass had not advanced greatly in America, said Professor Broome. Solemnly Oscar replied that it was a peculiar art, and that "so great an artist as Sir Joshua Reynolds has made in our country a flagrant error in it."

The Daytonians took their guest onward—to the new jail, the

Soldiers' Home, and the art pottery establishment. On catching sight of the jail, whose exterior was ornamented a bit fantastically, Wilde had to laugh. They took him quickly away, rode to Summit Street and presented him to some rather awe-stricken women who ran the pottery and its school. Good-humored Oscar, looming head and shoulders above them, as he examined a number of vases, pronounced them good—better than some he had seen in Cincinnati, in fact. Miss Carrie Broome presented him with a piece she had made. The great man accepted it with a bow.

More amenities at the home for old soldiers of the Union Army. The superintendent, the chaplain, and various officers were honored to show Oscar through the conservatory, the dining-hall, the theater, and the library. He stalked about, saying "Good!" and "Very nice." And crossing the river, and learning its name was Miami, he broke out, "Ah, how lovely are these Indian names!" With a recollection almost passionate, he began telling his hosts about the Rockies which he had so lately seen—"a garden of the world," he called them. The Miami indeed presented a beautiful scene, but, said he, "You should never let your manufacturers pollute the air with smoke."

## 2

The belching chimneys which the industrial revolution had set up in the flat midlands contrasted dismally with the great lonely splendor of the Western mountains. To a reporter, Widle declared, "It seems as though nature had exhausted her resources on the West and had nothing left for the prairies. . . . Not a tree, not a flower, not even an animal." He was unusually loquacious to the *Daily Democrat* reporter, for he had found a listener willing to write that his eccentric dress was "an eccentricity which loses its conspicuousness in the charm of his conversation, the depth of thought and brilliancy of expression." With a brilliance the reporter tried hard to reproduce, he talked about his effort to "teach the people that they can have beauty in everything"; about bad color schemes in wall paper, about furniture ("Look at that chair! Can anything be more horrid?"); about the outrageous cast-iron stove ("This is the first hotel I have been in for two or three weeks where my room did not have that horrid, dreadful thing"); about the Pre-Raphaelites, to whom he now said he did not belong; about Whistler, about Frank Duveneck, whose etchings were being mistaken for Whistler's, and who had been so inspired, in his time, by the Pre-Raphaelites.

"Duveneck," said Oscar, "is the greatest painter in America."

The *Democrat's* reporter misspelled Duveneck's name, being evidently ignorant of how this Kentucky-born, Cincinnati-trained artist was stirring Boston, New York, London, Munich, with his canvases and his extraordinary gifts as a teacher of youths like John W. Alexander and William M. Chase.

In his hotel room, after his tour of the town, Wilde talked as gravely and carefully as if facing Boston itself. He contrasted Whistler's “*Symphony in White*” with such pictures as “*Mary, Queen of Scots, About to Be Beheaded*,” painted, he said, by some artist who “ought to have been beheaded himself before he ever was allowed to paint such a picture.” The reporter got three columns of Oscar's views on all sorts of subjects.

## 3

As in several other Ohio cities, Oscar was invited to Columbus by an art association, the head of a civic movement to study and develop artistic taste. Arriving at noon on May 3rd he was entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Kelley (she had been the first president of the association). To interest the poet further he was introduced to Reverend Frank W. Gunsaulus, pastor of the High Street Congregational Church. Preacher and poet had a conversation about aesthetics; Gunsaulus, a deep student of both art and books, possibly had the best of it. Afterward he was quoted as having remarked, “I like aesthetic people, but, like Jim Wright, I don't like a damned fool.”

When time came for Gunsaulus to introduce Wilde in the Comstock Opera House, he did so without a single flattering word, “and then fled from the stage,” said the *State Journal*, “as he would have others flee from the wrath to come.” Oscar stood behind a small table covered with a red-checkered cloth which was much the worse for wear. The audience, however, the critic noted, was “large and appreciative; it was one of culture and refinement”—an indorsement of the art association rather than of Wilde. The lecturer filtered praise of the society, and also of the Columbus Art School, into his discourse on house decoration. He expressed the wish, however, that the school had about it gardens and fountains rather than plows, reapers, and the dingdong of shops.

## 4

Heading eastward, the travel-worn poet was soon back in the chain of cities which had introduced him to America. He paid a second visit to Whitman, and newspapers were soon printing and reprinting the rumor that the Camden poet had cooled toward him and had, indeed,

I have been through your country to some fifty or sixty cities, I think. I find that what your people need is not so much high imaginative art as that which hallows the vessel of everyday use."

He went on to his plea, already uttered scores of times, for better encouragement of the handicraftsman, and for "beautiful and rational designs." Then he began to specify, in his best vein, some of his objections to what he had seen:

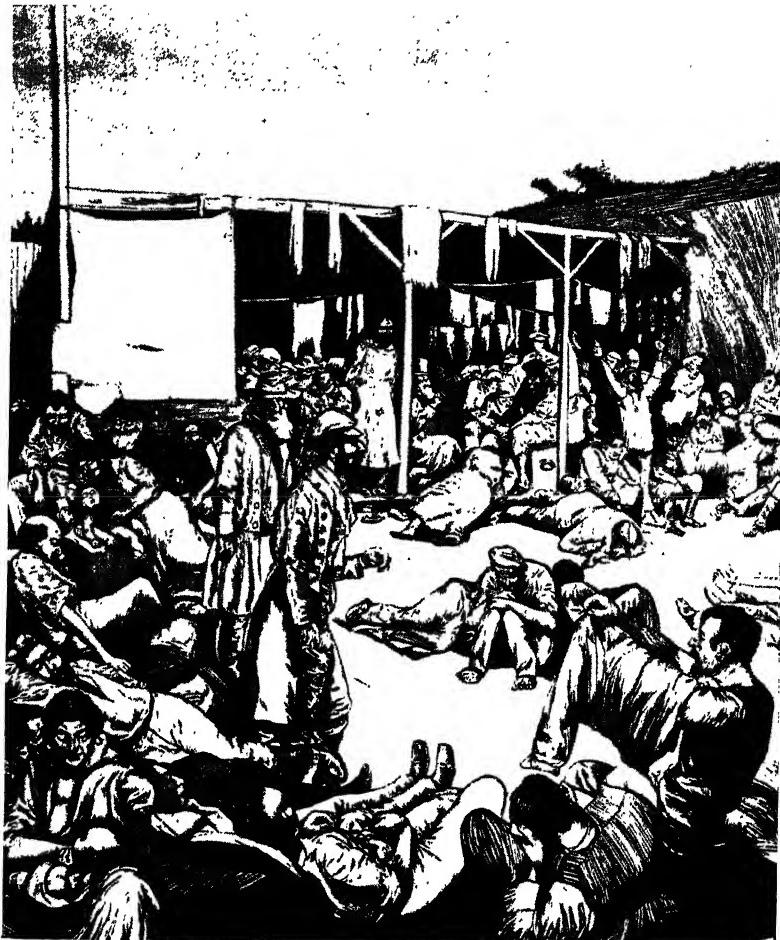
"I found everywhere I went bad wall papers, horribly designed and colored carpets, and that old offender, the horse-hair sofa, whose stolid look of indifference is always so depressing. I found meaningless chandeliers and machine-made furniture, generally of rosewood, which creaked dismally under the weight of the ubiquitous interviewer. I came across the small iron stove which they always persist in decorating with machine-made ornaments, which is as great a bore as a wet day or any other particularly dreadful institution."

The New Yorkers heard his assertion that the old Pilgrim furniture had his approval. They listened to his earnest argument that America "bring artists and handicraftsmen together." He passed to the subject of dress, which he thought "in the future will use drapery to a great extent, and abound in color." "At present," he asserted, "we have lost all nobility of dress, and in doing so have almost annihilated the modern sculptor. And in looking around at the figures which adorn our parks one could almost wish that we had completely killed the noble art. To see the frock coat of the drawing-room done into bronze, or the double waistcoat perpetuated in marble, adds a new horror to death."

With enthusiasm for many Western things animating him, he abruptly threw in New York's face his decision that "in all my journeys through the country, the only well-dressed men that I saw—and in saying this I earnestly deprecate the polished indignation of your Fifth Avenue dandies—were the Western miners." He told how he had made some of them promise that when they came East, after making their fortunes, they "would still continue to wear their lovely costumes" and never go back again to "the abominations of modern attire." They had promised to stick to their big hats and boots, but, sighed Oscar, "I don't believe they will."

Prompted by the success of the handicraft arts-school operated by his friend, Leland, in Philadelphia, and displaying samples he had picked up while visiting that school the previous day, Wilde proposed manual training as a definite part of public education—"a workshop attached to every school."

"In such work as this children learn to abhor the liar in art. It is a practical school of morals. No better way is there to learn to love Nature



### JEWISH IMMIGRANTS

*"Russian Jews at Castle Garden—A Scene in the Early Morning. From a Sketch by a Staff Artist."* "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,"  
August 5, 1882.



than to understand Art. And a boy who sees the thing of beauty which a bird on the wing becomes when transferred to wood or canvas, will probably not throw the customary stone.” In Switzerland barefoot boys carved wood beautifully; why not in America, too?

“Nothing,” Oscar concluded, “is so ignoble that art cannot sanctify it.” As he left the stage a woman in a box threw him a lily, and another woman followed with many jacqueminot roses.

The D’Oyly Carte organization, counting up at the end of the lecture, discovered that Oscar had drawn over \$900 into the box office. As an attraction he was very far from exhausted.

Canada would be next. *Patience* was done well up there, and the newspapers had carried reams of notes of how the British Aesthete had fared among the Yankees. Canadians ought to be hospitable to the son of homeland aristocrats.

## 5

In the days that followed, Oscar read the newspapers which D’Oyly Carte’s representative brought to the Pullman seat or hotel rooms for clipping:

May 13, Cincinnati: Ten pairs of boots, each sworn to be the originals in which Jesse James died, are on view in various parts of the country.

May 15, Chicago: Another Charlie Ross has popped up, this time in our city. Someone should have kept count of all the Charlies that have appeared since the real boy was kidnaped from his Philadelphia home eight years ago.

May 18, New York: Photography is coaxing youth out of doors. Young people may be met with on country roads nowadays with a long tripod and tiny camera. Not everybody can sketch, so the simplification of the photographic art is cause for gratitude among young people who love pictures.

May 22, Cincinnati: Oscar Wilde is said to be writing a book on the education of children.

May 22, New York: Immigrants enter Castle Garden 3,000 to 5,000 a day. Last Thursday 4,500 arrived. Counting all American ports, 40,000 a week will arrive during the summer months. The Czar’s persecutions are sending Russian Jews by the thousand. Evictions in Ireland and compulsory military service in Germany are sending more thousands.

May 22, Boston: On March 1, Attorney-General Marston notified Osgood & Co., publishers, they must eliminate from *Leaves of Grass* two poems, “To a Common Prostitute” and “A Woman Waits for Me.”

The edition had been published in November, 1881, at \$2, the author receiving twenty-five cents a copy. So far his receipts have been around \$400. Osgood & Co. have asked Walt Whitman to eliminate the two poems so that publication can continue. Whitman's answer is "No."

## 6

When news came to Montreal that Wilde would lecture there on May 15th, the English newspapers were less derisive than had been their American cousins. The French editors of the city were, however, more like Yankees—the nickname which had once been applied only to citizens of the Northeastern States but which, thanks to Confederate soldiers' epithets, was now applied to all Northerners. *La Patrie* predicted that Wilde would attract "all the people of disordered brains, the hysterical women, the coxcombs, the beggared population." And when the lecturer arrived on the 14th, *Le Monde* described small boys at the station staring at one who "looked partly like a comic-opera brigand, partly like a quack doctor."

An English newspaper, the *Daily Star*, by contrast, informed its readers that Wilde "had been born in an enviable social status," the son of "Speranza" and of Sir William Wilde "eminent oculist and surgeon-oculist to Queen Victoria." The *Star's* reporter, interviewing him in the Windsor Hotel, when he arrived, thought the American newspapers unjust in calling him affected, and said he was very practical except when, at the end of a long talk, he became "intense" in describing color as his "greatest enjoyment in life, from the rising of the sun till the setting."

The reporter of the *Montreal Witness* felt similarly after interviewing the young poet, and declared that he was neither a Postlethwaite, nor a Reginald Bunthorne, and that Messrs. Du Maurier, Burnand, and Gilbert had all done him a grave injustice.

To both reporters Wilde took high and confident ground when they asked him how the aesthetic movement was faring in England. He reproved them for calling it a "fashion"; it was anything but a fashion, it was a "return to the right principles of art. It has entirely altered the whole character of ordinary English decoration. . . . William Morris has just received from the government the contract for the decoration of St. James's Palace."

As to his effect on America, Wilde told the *Witness's* questioner that decorative art societies had been started in cities where he had lectured "and old societies brought into more prominence. My whole correspondence is on this subject. Here is a letter only received this morning,

referring to the effect of my visit to Philadelphia last week.” The letter was from Charles Leland, “the famous Hans Breitman and a member of our school” thanking Wilde for “the good he had done in connection with the teaching of art principles to the young.” Leland reported “an increase of orders given to the art societies.”

Wilde explained to the reporter, “In America, you see, I have for the first time been face to face with people who have never seen any good art. . . . I have been all over the States except in the South, and I suppose it is difficult to guess that I have spoken to some two hundred thousand people. They had been ready to listen.”

To the *Star's* interviewer he explained the difference between “our aesthetes and those of the last century.” The latter, the German philosophers, he said, “were content to live in the midst of the most dreadful surroundings, provided they could call beauty long names. We want to produce beautiful things, which is very much more practical. . . . When you can bend fashion to the service of anything good or beautiful, it is of immense importance.”

He questioned the *Star's* representative on Canadian Universities, “I take great interest in universities everywhere.” When told what Canada had in this line, Wilde commented, “It is better for the country to have a good general standard of education than to have, as we have in England, a few desperately overeducated, and the remainder ignorant. One of the things that delighted me most in America was that the universities reached a class that we, in Oxford, have never been able to reach, the sons of the farmers and people of moderate means.” When he was told that in Canadian universities it was possible for a student to work at outside jobs while obtaining his education, Wilde thrust home an objection, “I do not think any university which does not require residence on the part of its undergraduates is anything more than a good day school.”

His appearance at Queen’s Hall, that evening of May 15th, was before an audience that filled every seat.

There was a noticeable shock when Wilde spoke of Montreal’s cherished mountain as a “hill,” and the *Star's* reporter heard only “a little splutter of cheering” as Wilde’s “solemnly receded” at the end of his lecture. The people who had been having “a mental struggle” to absorb Wilde’s ideas as he had gone along had been deeply impressed, and “would have applauded, but feared it would be a desecration.”

So successful was the lecture that the D’Oyly Carte representatives announced Wilde would give another on the afternoon of May 22nd, part of the proceeds going to the Women’s Hospital.

At Ottawa, where he spoke next, Wilde realized how completely Canada had followed America into industrialism and business. Here were lumber mills blackening the sky with their smoke and corrupting streams with their sawdust. In California, newspapers had told him of the Anti-Débris organization with which some farmers were attempting to force hydraulic mines to quit dumping their waste into streams and ruining land downstream. And in that very April he had read complaints of the American Forestry Congress, which was organizing in Cincinnati against the rapid waste of forests.

As a Socialist, the poet opposed such exploitation of natural resources. "The things of nature do not really belong to us," he said; "we should leave them to our children as we have received them."

How this philosophy, if put into action, would have delayed the settlement of the West, was a question he did not face.

The Aesthete was thinking seriously of these things, shaping them into words for use at some future time, when there appeared a copy of the *Montreal Witness* of April 15, voicing the reactionary and orthodox Tory faith of the dominant businessman in North America.

The *Witness*'s editorial observed how, across history, thought swung like a pendulum, going from the religious fervor of the seventeenth century to the materialism of the eighteenth, then to the strong spiritualism of the Whitfield and Wesley revivals. Next "the sneering unbelief of Paine and Voltaire was offset by the blubbering instinct worship of Rousseau, Klopstock, and Lavater and its later reflection among the Puritans of New England, the transcendentalism and mysticism of Boston." In like manner, "the all-pervading positivism of today, which will believe nothing but what can be learned from the senses, has differentiated from itself the sensuous sentimentalism of the aesthetics," whose "gush is nothing new, but only a weak reflection of the rainbow of the *Sturm und Drang* in Germany as was the aforesaid transcendental revival in Boston."

The English Renaissance, "ransacking the ages for objects beautified by the bloom of time," might do good, "but there is danger of art losing her virginity when she seeks to charm by her own blandishments, and to become herself a queen instead of keeping her modest place as the unconscious handmaid of nature."

Wilde, clipping this, had at last found newspaper criticism that was a scholarly and cogent statement of reaction, but it did not swing him back to the conventional way in which a British aristocrat and son of titled parents was expected to walk.

Back in Montreal, on the 22nd, after a lecture in Kingston, he found, as in San Francisco, that a matinee lecture, given a few days after an initial performance in the evening, brought forth an audience warmer in its laughter and applause. Enjoying an audience which enjoyed him, he revealed in this “Exterior and Interior House Decoration” lecture, the thing that managers had seen—he could at these matinees be more nearly what he was in private conversation: witty, expressive, eloquent, persuasive, and wholly free from the self-conscious and monotonous dullness which marred his usual platform delivery. Now he could state more epigrammatically some of the points which had been more stilted in his manuscript:

“Two pictures, hung side by side, kill each other, or rather both commit artistic suicide.

“The modern bonnet keeps off neither sun in summer nor rain in winter.

“Eastlake furniture is really Gothic shorn of half its beauty.

“The grand piano is a funeral case. I prefer the upright.

“The cloak is the simplest and most beautiful form of drapery ever devised. Nothing is more graceful in the world than the broad-brimmed hat of the Rocky Mountain miners.”



AFRICA.

AMERICA

#### NATURE AND CULTURE

*While Oscar Wilde was urging American women to return to the simple draperies of Greece for their fashions, the actual styles were moving so rapidly in the opposite direction that “Puck,” on July 5, 1882, professed to foresee the day when the modern belle in tight-fitting gown and hip-decorations would be indistinguishable from the African woman, naked save for a fancy breechclout. . . .*

He left Montreal on a wave of happiness and reached Toronto on the morning of May 24th to find something still better—“a deputation of gentlemen belonging to the city” escorted him to the Queen’s Hotel

and then to the Lieutenant-Governor's private box at a lacrosse game which the Toronto team was playing that afternoon with the St. Regis Indians.

"Here's Oscar Wilde!" rang the cry as his great black sombrero, tawny mane, flowing cloak, fastened with "tasseled cord," came through the gate. The crowded grandstand was agog, "juveniles were boisterous" until their elders shushed them down. The tall visitor ambled easily to the box, was introduced to the Governor's ladies, and sat down, the reporter of the *Toronto Globe* observing that he made "immediately a favorable impression."

The Canadians liked him even better as, during their national game, he was rapt in unaffected enjoyment, "laughing heartily when any of the players went unceremoniously to grass, or clapping his hands when a good piece of work was done." Departing shortly before the end of the game, he told the *Globe* reporter, "Oh, I was delighted with it. It is a charming game." He asked who the "tall, finely built defense man was" and when told that it was Ross Mackenzie, he observed, "I admired his playing very much; he appeared so thoroughly at home in the game. Lacrosse is so far ahead of cricket for physical development, and then everyone seems to get an equal share of the play or hard work, I term it."

He complimented the women spectators on their dress, particularly one little girl who had sat in front of him. He called Toronto "a bright little town," but he couldn't understand why it, and all Canada, used "horrid white brick when red is the same price." He thought "white brick such a shallow color."

That night the entertainments and receptions began and the next afternoon the Ontario Society of Artists held a special view of their paintings for him in their rooms on King Street, West. Members of the Lieutenant-Governor's staff were present and everybody followed Wilde, noting what he noted and bending forward to hear his comments. Painter Watson he praised highly for his clever landscapes. He was often heard to say "very pleasing" and "beautiful" as he walked through the rooms, a lion of lions. Before painting No. 29 "Ka-ka-be-kah Falls," a picture of waves "rushing pell-mell over each other," he was heard by a *Toronto Telegram* reporter to murmur, "That water is too happy."

From the art exhibit he was taken by Professor Pike to the University where the faculty explained educational matters and treated him as a distinguished literary man.

That night he was in fine spirits. The *Toronto Globe* critic saw the Grand Opera House overflowing with as "representative and élite" an

audience as it had held on any but a very few occasions in its history. Many patrons sat on camp-stools in the aisle. “Gallery gods” had been whistling snatches of *Patience* as they had waited for Wilde, and as he came on the applause was loud and long.

“Art Decoration” was the lecture, and early in it “he denounced very strenuously” a crimson table cloth which covered the table behind which he stood. It was almost as bad as the one at Columbus, Ohio.

The Canadians did not dislike him for that and, laughing readily at the right times, spurred Wilde to do his best.

## 9

The day after Wilde’s lecture, the *Globe* announced that Oscar would speak again, this time on “The House Beautiful,” next Saturday afternoon at 2:20, “and if it is as well packed as was the Grand Opera House last night it will assuredly be a house beautiful in the estimation of the business manager.”

Followed then two days almost as gracious as those in San Francisco—receptions in private homes, a musical at the Government House, a tea at the home of the Lieutenant-Governor, hours sitting for a bust by sculptor Dunbar, and all but one of the newspapers complimentary. The one dissenter was the *Telegram*, which invented abusive interviews, pretending that it had assumed him to be a woman and had discovered against its will that he was a man, ridiculing him personally and with heavy hand. He was, it said, “very tall, with a face like a broad-ax,” his necktie was the “color of diseased liver,” his shoulder blades “high and intellectual”; he “posed like a giraffe with the colic for the benefit of those who stood near,” he wore “light pingium suspenders,” he “smiles every little while like a colicky baby in its sleep,” and his teeth are unsightly.

The chorus of other newspapers was, however, most dignified, and he departed in the morning of May 29th with the feeling of success as the *Mail* reporter wrote, “Mr. Wilde leaves with Mr. Vale to fill an engagement at Woodstock. After spending Wednesday in Hamilton, he will leave for New York where he will rest for a week. Early in June he will commence a month’s lecture tour of Southern States at Richmond, after which he will sail for Japan.”

## 3

## “MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER IN THE SOUTH”

BUT Oscar did not go direct from Hamilton to New York for a week's rest. Locke, darting ahead of him, had decided to chance Boston again, and was inserting in the newspapers of that city advertisements for a farewell lecture, Friday afternoon, June 2nd.

The matinee proved anticlimax—prices too high, \$1 for the main floor and first balcony. Three hundred Bostonians, filling half the downstairs in the Globe and leaving the galleries empty, did not care to hear Wilde's tributes to the sartorial good sense of Western miners.

Wilde returned to New York, where, soon enough, the reporters would be learning of another defeat for their enemy—a defeat at the hands of a child in one of the homes the poet was visiting while awaiting the time to start south. The *Cincinnati Commercial* reprinted the disaster in full:

“Last week Oscar Wilde dined at a private residence in New York, and when the cloth was removed, the oldest child of the host, a girl of eight, was introduced. She stared at the great man who was so marvelously arrayed, timidly shook his hand, then crept to her mother's side and whispered, ‘Mamma, I don't think Marie had better bring baby in; it might be scared.’”

In New York, Oscar's friend Sam Ward was gracious as always, but for once in his life more interested in an American than a European. His intimacy with Longfellow had brought him unusual notice ever since the poet's death.

“We first met in Heidelberg in March, 1836,” Sam would say. “We were great friends. I used to go up to Boston once a month to spend Sunday with him.

“I'll tell you how he wrote ‘Skeleton in Armor,’ one of his greatest poems. In 1839, I think it was, he rode with my sister, Mrs. Howe, and a gay party from Newport to Fall River where there was a skeleton in armor, exhumed at Taunton and brought to Fall River for exhibition. Longfellow challenged my sister to write a poem about it. She didn't. He kept it in his mind for a year, then wrote it.

“He showed it to me, said his Boston admirers thought he oughtn't

to publish it. They said it was not up to his standard. I read it, took it to Lewis Gaylord of the *Knickerbocker Magazine* and had him give Longfellow \$50 for it. That was a large price for any poetical production in those days.

"About ten years ago, when paying Longfellow my usual Christmas visit, he read me 'The Hanging of the Crane,' for which Robert Bonner of the *New York Ledger* paid me \$4,000. When I first mentioned the existence of such a poem to Bonner, he offered me \$1,000. Longfellow declined the price.

"Longfellow was a noiseless sewing machine in his work. He translated the *Inferno* by ten minutes' daily work, standing at a desk in his library while coffee was reaching the boiling point on the breakfast table."

Wilde could not stay long listening to Sam Ward's boasts. On Friday, July 9th, he slipped out of New York, bound for Memphis which, instead of Richmond, was to be his starting point for the Southern trip.

2

In Memphis an adventurous showman "General" Peter Tracy had temporarily supplanted D'Oyly Carte as Wilde's manager and was calling upon his own city and the whole South to patronize the tour because it was "a Southern enterprise." Wilde was due to start the venture on Monday, June 12th, and on Thursday morning at nine o'clock, seats for the lecture were auctioned off, the highest bidder taking first choice. An advance man, Frank Gray, secured by Tracy, had arrived from New York on Wednesday and had the newspapers print the news that Wilde would give "The English Renaissance" lecture—"This address has been listened to by the largest lecture audiences which have been seen since the days of Charles Dickens, and has awakened a wide interest in the poet and his topic, an interest which is daily becoming stronger. . . . Whatever Mr. Wilde has to say on the Renaissance is certain to be, sooner or later, repeated everywhere."

On Saturday, Wilde halted in Cincinnati as he went toward Memphis, and that evening was taken by friends to a meeting of the Musical Club to hear Dr. Forcheimer read a paper on "Our Musical State." As the doctor ended, the chairman called up Wilde who, for ten minutes, attacked American outdoor advertising, told the story of his whisky-supper in the Leadville mine, described how in the Mormon country he had realized polygamy was most prosaic, how much more poetic it was to marry one and love many, and how "no living English novelist can be named with Henry James and Howells."

Next day he lectured at three in the afternoon at the Grand Opera House—"The Farewell Lecture of Oscar Wilde—Decorative Arts—admission 25 cents, reserved seats 50 cents." Sunday performances were popular, no matter what the Methodist and Baptist civilizations out over Ohio might say about "the godless Dutch," and this Sunday matinee was low in price, but Wilde's audience was smaller than at his first appearance, four months before, and the *Commercial*, having had time to think over Wilde and his strictures upon America, was ready to bring him up short, in its report of June 12th, on practical, humanitarian grounds. Laborers all over the country had been striking for higher pay, and the *Commercial* bluntly said Oscar Wilde should have "dared to go to the root of the matter and have told how impossible it is for the workman or handicraftsman to rise to even conscientious work when he cannot have a house that is decently ventilated and drained, when he is condemned to no profit on the result of his labor that permits him to have a bare existence."

## 3

As Wilde in the late afternoon of Monday, June 12th, came to Memphis and the commencement of "the Southern enterprise," it was apparent to any observer familiar with the state of the nation why D'Oyly Carte had shrunk from risking his own money on a trip through Dixie.

Wilde himself might have learned much from Albion W. Tourgee, editor of *Our Continent*, the Philadelphia magazine to which he had sold two poems. Tourgee, an Ohioan who had lived in the South for years after the war, and who now lectured and wrote books about the section, was telling Northerners that nothing but education would lift the South out of the dejection into which the war and difficulties of transition from slave to free labor, had plunged it. All this talk of "The New South," based upon tripling of cotton spindles in North Carolina, opening of iron works in Alabama, was beside the point.

"Pour ten million dollars into the schools of the South and coming generations will grow up enlightened, and the differences of the North and South will disappear," Tourgee was saying. Industry and politics wouldn't help. Northerners "believe that the Angel Gabriel will straddle the dividing line and toot his trumpet and throw olive branches all over the country. Such talk is hot fudge!"

"The Southerners are a different people from the North, as distinct in habits and thought as are the residents of St. Petersburg and Constantinople. They are not the same people, and you cannot make them

so. You might as well try to batter down Gibraltar with green peas as to overcome in a single day or year these inborn differences."

The dominant Republican Party of the North was just surrendering, as Wilde crossed the Ohio River, its fond dream of establishing itself in the South. On May 30th the *New York Times* had published the result of a questionnaire sent to fifty Southern editors. They agreed, "The South is solid in its affiliations with the Democratic Party. On all national issues, the people are a unit."

Politically and economically Wilde was entering the South at the worst possible time for a lecturer on art. The one class that could, in all America, have understood him best, the plantation grandees who had maintained handicraft units, and who had made much of literature and visiting Britishers, was impoverished, dispirited. Overthrown during the war, they had revived somewhat in the upward leap of cotton prices after the conflict, but when prices slumped they had lost their lands and seen, through the 1870's, their wide acres cut up into little farms for Negroes or for "the niggerless"—the poor whites. And now these small farmers, the hill people who had come down onto the bottoms, were rising politically, demanding that their senators and congressmen, relics of the master-class—"Confederate Brigadiers" they were called—be ousted from office. They did little but sit around Washington like sad plenipotentiaries of a subject state at their ruler's court. Aristocrats, they were too proud to combat the greed and corruption with which so many of the Northern industrialists got governmental awards.

The small farmers of the South, weary of poverty, weary of economic slavery, were eyeing new non-aristocratic leaders like Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina, who would represent them so earnestly as to earn the nickname "Pitchfork Ben."

There was no such cash in the South as there was in the North and Far West enabling farmers to drive into town and spend a dollar to hear a man in knee pants talk about new dadoes for the drawing-room.

Many farmers in the South said they were no better off than the slaves had been seventeen years ago. They were chained to a financial system, that was the only difference. The small cotton grower's banker was the village merchant, the factor. All year a man lived on the factor's credit, waiting till his cotton was sold before he paid his bills at the store, if, indeed, it brought enough to meet the bill. This meant that he had to pay whatever interest the factor chose to charge, anywhere from twenty to one hundred and twenty per cent, and that he had to buy clothes, food, implements, from his master. He had to plant the crops the merchant wanted planted, and the merchant wanted cotton.

The merchant did not want him to plant corn lest he use it to feed himself and his animals. The merchant wanted him to buy corn at the store at one hundred per cent profit.

Wilde would pass through Southern counties where the farmers actually came to their merchants for butter and vegetables—and paid fifty per cent premium for their helplessness.

The editors of the *Nation* were preparing to publish still another explanation for the lack of cash in the South: Northern and European capitalists feared to make farm mortgages in the South as in the midlands and Far West. Southerners had the reputation for pulling pistols on collection agents, and Southern courts were said to make foreclosures very difficult. Foreign immigrants had not been welcomed as in the North, and it was the immigrants who snapped up farms as they came on the market and thus kept land values high. If the South would "suppress the practice of shooting at first sight, it would be worth hundreds of millions of dollars to it in the next fifteen years," capital would flow down, let the farmer finance his operations at a mere six per cent, and thus be freed from his bondage to the merchant.

## 4.

All day on Monday, June 12th, scenic artists had labored to make the stage at Memphis's Leubrie's Theater "a perfect bijou of decorative art," and at 9:40 that night, when Oscar Wilde came from Gaston's Hotel to the theater, "a cultivated audience of six hundred people" was waiting in the satisfaction of knowing Memphis was appreciative.

Wilde was well launched upon his "Decorative Art" address—Gray had advertised it wrongly—when up from the audience came a three-year-old girl to hand him "a beautifully arranged basket of fresh flowers." He said he was "glad to see so early so young and beautiful a disciple."

It was the beginning of four weeks of uninterrupted compliments to Southern femininity.

Although the *Daily Advertiser*, over in Montgomery, Alabama, heard that Wilde had told Tracy, "Do not advertise to catch coarse people, as I only care to speak to audiences that are educated and refined," the *Public Ledger* in Memphis saw Tracy tack onto the Pullman car which was to carry Oscar southward, "a flaming white canvas with the great Aesthete's name printed on it in big black letters."

And on the morning of Tuesday, June 13th, the *Ledger* reporter beheld a comic thing: "It had been given out among a large crowd of

darkies gathered at the depot to bid good-by to a Mississippi brass band, colored, here for picnic purposes, that Buffalo Bill was the hero who designed going down on the train, and when Oscar and his manager emerged from their hack at the depot, the band struck up 'See the Conquering Hero,' while the crowd gathered about the pair in great numbers and cheered for 'Buffalo Bill' with a hearty will."

Due in Vicksburg on the evening of June 14th, Wilde left the train, its sign, and its picnic Negro band at Grenada, and was seen, while taking tea in the afternoon, to be approached by "some aesthetic Yalabushian of Choctaw descent" who, as the *Public Ledger* understood, "presented the excruciatingly idyllic disciple with an intensely intense bouquet as big as a barrel-head, made up of jimson weeds, dogfennel, acanthus blossoms and twigs, a ripe sunflower and a green ditto in the center. The lackadaisical Oscar returned a sickly smile as a token of appreciation, and did not look for an encore."

Mr. Wilde would be taken out at Vicksburg and shown the old entrenchments which General Grant had used during the long siege that had ended in Confederate surrender, the one most decisive event in the whole war, the defeat that had made it certain the United States could never be split into two nations.

A visiting Britisher would hear much of the Mississippi River and of the town at its mouth which had dominated it and the great valley, New Orleans—the city which forty years earlier would have been the one city to fit Oscar Wilde's dreams.

In the days before the railroads had risen to power, New Orleans had been the focal point for the Great Valley. On steamships, rafts, and flatboats had come grain, cotton, furs, slaves, tobacco, from the region between the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghenies. In the minds of the midland agrarians, New Orleans had been the great town, the romantic town, the rich town, and so long as water travel had been dominant, it had remained so—a gay, epicurean, friendly metropolis whose French character fitted well into the Jeffersonian culture of the agrarian West.

So wholly had it captured the imagination of the midlands that the first great railroad of the section had run down to it instead of to the more populous ports of the Atlantic seaboard. Up to the 1870's, however, the Great Valley had associated New Orleans with steamships rather than railroads. The handicraft civilization might be greedy enough to subscribe for new railroad bonds, but it had disliked the snorting, ugly little engines that ran on rails, and it had continued to love the steamboats on the river. The machine had never been so hostile

to the handicraftsman as when on rails, never so friendly as when hidden in the beguiling form of a ship.

The opening of the Civil War in 1861 had put an end to the bond between New Orleans and the upper expanse of the Great Valley. With the Confederate fortification of Vicksburg, traffic on the river had stopped. The midlands had been forced to use the new East-West railroads in order to market their grain and meat. Immediately the railroad magnates, sitting in their Eastern offices, had raised freight rates, and such a roar had risen from the farmers that only some expert political and military maneuvering by President Lincoln had halted the movement for a Northwestern Confederacy, which would have declared peace with the South and formed an economic alliance giving it access to New Orleans.

By the time the war had ended, the railroads and the industrialists of the East had the midlands well chained. The river steamers had held their own for a time. The *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee* had held their spectacular race from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1870, and the fabulously elegant *Grand Republic* and the *J. M. White* had been built in the last half of the 1870 decade, but the hold of the railroads, gained by means of the war, was yearly more apparent. The Mississippi steamers still made people talk romantically, but the freight cars got the tonnage.

While Oscar Wilde was traveling southward by train, Mark Twain, having just ended a trip on the river, was returning to his home in Elmira to write a book about the old days when he had been pilot on a steamboat. He knew the great days of the stream, with its floating palaces, its gamblers, its teeming life, would never come again, and he wanted to put into book form, together with modern comments, some earlier newspaper pieces he had written about life on the Mississippi.

Jay Gould was now the big man in New Orleans's prospects. He was making the city the center of his Southern expansion just as he was making Kansas City his center in the West. Railways up through the Red River Valley to St. Louis, and "through traffic" roads to California were being completed. Freight to the Pacific Coast would now go by rail instead of by ocean freighters rounding the Horn. Ocean tonnage was falling too.

New Orleans was talking of new industries, of the new Cotton Exchange Building, of the two hundredth anniversary of La Salle's discovery of the Mississippi's mouth, celebrated April 10th, and of the gift of almost \$300,000 for a university just made by an ex-citizen, Paul Tulane.





JEFFERSON DAVIS

*"Jefferson Davis, sketched from life."* "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,"  
July 9, 1881.

In New Orleans, as Wilde entered it, could still be seen remnants of the old handicraft days, beautifully designed iron grill-work on balconies in the French quarter, doorways done leisurely by artisans who had taken pride in their work, houses whose owners had praised the builders while the slow work went on.



WASHINGTON, D. C.—THE CLOSING ACT IN THE GREAT NATIONAL TRAGEDY.—MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF GUTEAU'S BODY AFTER THE EXECUTION.

### GUITEAU'S DEATH

A staff artist's sketch of the execution of President Garfield's assassin, Charles Guiteau. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," July 8, 1882.

It was the morning of Friday, June 16th, as Wilde passed from the railroad station to the St. Charles Hotel, the city's finest. The *Daily Picayune* noted how the day had "dawned in faultless taste" and how "the flowers beamed with ardent joy."

To the *Picayune* reporter who speedily came popping into his room, where he sat with cologne water, cigarettes, and paper-backed French novels, Oscar said he had found Southerners "more agreeable and courteous than Northerners." In Chicago, people "pushed with a brusque sort of energy, in the South people are more quiet and polite. It may be the result of climatic effects."

Oscar went on: "I have nothing to do with commerce and what is called progress. I am a student of art. I see that in the rush and crash of business the native and characteristic picturesqueness of people is being rapidly destroyed, and I desire to do what I can to rescue from oblivion the truly artistic peculiarities that still survive."

"One must go to Asia and Africa for picturesqueness in human costume and habits. In America I have found it only in the Indians and the Negro, and I am surprised that painters and poets have paid so little attention to them, particularly to the Negro, as a subject of art."

He spoke well of George W. Cable, the local novelist whose descriptions of French-Southern life had become popular, and whom the city had especially admired ever since Longfellow had hailed his *The Grandissimes* as inaugurating a new era in American romance. Wilde also complimented the verse of Father Ryan, the poet-priest.

The reporter heard Wilde "speak of his relatives in Louisiana, of whom Dr. J. K. Elgee, who had once lived in Rapides parish, where he had been quite prominent in local politics, was his mother's brother;" and in reply to the remark that it had been reported he had come to look after some of the family possessions, Oscar said that "however much he might desire to have a plantation in Louisiana, not the least of the attractions of which would be the proprietorship of groves of magnolia trees, he had no such object in view."

New Orleans was hospitable. A Dr. Dobell escorted Wilde in the afternoon through the Southern Art Union rooms, and, later, there came to pick him up at the hotel and take him for a drive, the city's military hero, General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, who, as a Confederate militarist, was believed by Louisiana to have been far superior to General Robert E. Lee of Virginia. Around town it would be hotly maintained that the elegant and handsome Beauregard had

been held back during the war because the Confederacy had been run by and for Virginians, and that Beauregard's Creole blood and Roman Catholic faith had been cause enough for the bigoted Protestants of Richmond to deny him the power to which his talents entitled him.

A call from Beauregard was proof that Oscar Wilde was in the first social position, and the news spread quickly. The two men, one so young and tall, the other so gray and slight, passed into the Cathedral where the General worshiped and where Wilde, perhaps, felt again the drawing power which Catholicism always set up in his Protestant, but poetic, blood.

That night Wilde, entering the Grand Opera House, was applauded heartily by an audience "select, large, and brilliant" which listened attentively while the speaker gave his "Decorative Art" lecture. That Wilde was pleased became apparent as he expanded the speech to the length of an hour and a half. In the Missouri River towns he had cut it to forty minutes.

Next morning, Cable himself called and "told him much of the interesting peculiarities of the traditional life and history of New Orleans," and in the afternoon Wilde was taken to see "Xariffa"—Mrs. Mary Ashley Townsend—"of whose poems he spoke in praise"; then, in turn, to the Boston and the Commercial Clubs, which had elected him to honorary membership, and back to his hotel, where the fashionable folk were calling upon him.

## 6

On the morning of June 18th, after a night of fashionable entertainment, Wilde entrained for Texas.

The largest of the American States stretched outside the train windows. First cypress trees, jungles, gray moss, alligators, then the flat plains, the chaparral, and cactus. Wire fences and railroads were cutting up the most famous range of the cowboy. Six years before, Texas had had comparatively few railroads, and short. Of the 5,900 miles which now crisscrossed it one-quarter had been finished in the last twelve months.

Blackstone was supplanting Colt in cattle towns, although in the more distant regions cowboys were still fighting the oncoming sheep-herders. Wool had become Texas's third crop now, the first being cotton and the second cattle.

On the train, passengers would be talking about the new State capitol going up at Houston. It was promised to have the highest dome in America, higher than the one at Washington. Chicago businessmen,

"the restless Yankees" who were the soul of the Windy City, had come down and agreed to put up the most pretentious of all State capitols in exchange for 3,000,000 acres of land up in the extreme northwestern part of the State—"The Panhandle." The building was to be done by 1888, at which time the Chicagoans' land would, it was expected, be worth around \$7,000,000. Texas did not resent Yankee money as did more eastern parts of the South. Texas regarded itself as more Western than Southern—a section all by itself, "The Lone Star State," as became a commonwealth which had been independent of everybody when it had won freedom from Mexico and then allied itself with the United States.

Galveston, a seaport of 23,000 people, 5,400 of them Negroes, was Wilde's destination. But Houston saw him first, when he changed cars on the morning of the 19th and before staring crowds ate breakfast at Hutchin's Restaurant. That night a large audience, "mostly ladies," assembled in Galveston's Pavilion.

The evening began badly. Electricity, that proud new evidence of the city's progressiveness, suffered a break in its Pavilion circuit and it was some time before the stage was illumined. Then, when the lecturer got under way, there rose a racket from a "motley crowd of persons, intent upon drowning the voice of the lecturer, which is not a powerful one at best." Next day the critic for the *Daily News* decided that "those who could hear Wilde gave him credit for a thorough familiarity with his subject, Decorative Art," yet "the lecture was not a success by any means, and were he to appear tonight he would scarcely rally a corporal's guard."

San Antonio's 20,000 white population had been lectured for a week by the *Evening Light* on the necessity for showing the "live man of genius" a favorable view of "the social life and aesthetic capabilities of Texas" when he should arrive on Wednesday, June 21st.

On the newspaper, as a reporter, was H. Ryder-Taylor, who had known Wilde years before, and who now published references to this "old acquaintanceship" and his enthusiasm for the prospective visitor. Ryder-Taylor was at the depot when Wilde alighted at 9 A.M. on the 21st, and the two Britishers drove to the Menger Hotel with the solicitous Vale. While Wilde went up to his room, Ryder-Taylor talked with other passengers from the train and learned things about the trip.

Wilde had lost his hat while standing on the platform of the car. Wilde had "got out of the sleeping berth, looking like the last rose of summer before last, and it had taken two hours' work for his colored servant to reconstruct him."

When Ryder-Taylor went up to Oscar's room, he found his friend

having a drink at a table covered with books and mammoth cigarettes, and complaining "of a feeling of lassitude which he attributed to taking a bath at Galveston." Eventually Wilde talked on his new theme—the basic agreement between art and industry. "I would have a workman work for the honor of his craft as well as for his wife." When the interviewer asked him about the Mormons, Wilde said, "I never saw such an unintelligent or ugly race. The children are innumerable, but pretty, not happy. Mormons have no idea of art."

Financially the lecture at Turner's Hall that night was a success, the *Light* describing the audience "as intelligent and élite," although "many of Oscar Wilde's pet sentences were lost on account of his very poor delivery and the squeaking of the new boots of some of the thirsty ones going out for refreshments. One hour was too long between drinks."

The *Light* had had the speech taken down in shorthand, and next day Wilde, reading it carefully in print, told Ryder-Taylor that it was the most accurate to be published "south of Boston."

The two men went off for a tour of the city and suburbs, Oscar pronouncing the door and window of the San Jose mission the finest he had seen in America. The Alamo, State shrine where Davy Crockett, Colonel Bowie, and other patriots had been massacred by Mexicans almost forty years before, was, in Wilde's eye, a noble building, and it was "monstrous" that it was not better cared for.

When the 6:30 train left for Houston that night, Wilde was on it waving Ryder-Taylor good-by.

Only a few of Houston's 12,000 white citizens were at Gray's Opera House when Wilde appeared, and of these, several had to be "ejected from the gallery for misbehavior." Disturbances were frequent and someone "annoyed the lecturer by ringing the large gong in the saloon below." His set affectations and horrible declamation had been unpleasant, but the *Post* scolded Houston roundly for belittling a man whose ideas of art were sound and much needed in a young community, and who was himself "very different from the foolish, popular idea of an aesthetic Quixote charging upon American realism with a sunflower."

Wilde's tour of the rapidly growing State was over. It had not included many towns and villages which would have interested him, for instance, the hamlet of Richmond, where dwelt a strange woman running a little hotel, supporting her G.A.R. husband, David Nation, and four relatives, her body exhausted with June heat and overwork, her mind seething with dreams and phantoms. Nightly her thoughts harked back to her first husband, Dr. Charles Gloyd, who had died of alcoholism. As she chopped kitchen kindling with a hatchet, Carrie Nation had long talks with angels, Jesus, and God.

Oscar Wilde had nothing to say of his defeats in Texas when, on the evening of Saturday, June 24th, a *Picayune* reporter found him standing at the window of the St. Charles Hotel, in New Orleans. The Britisher was as sporting as when the Oxford boys had dragged him, skinned and bleeding, to the top of the hill. The view was still charming.

To the reporter he said:

"There are in Texas two spots which gave me infinite pleasure. These are Galveston and San Antonio. Galveston, set like a jewel in a crystal sea, was beautiful. Its fine beach, its shady avenues of oleander, and its delightful sea breezes were something to be enjoyed. It was in San Antonio, however, that I found more to please me. . . . Those old Spanish churches, with their picturesque remains and dome and their handsome carved stonework, standing amid the verdure and sunshine of a Texas prairie, gave me a thrill of strange pleasure."

He had been delighted with the alligators "basking in the sunshine or dancing in the shade." Yes, it was quite all right, now, to call him "Colonel Wilde."

"I am a colonel by all the rules and regulations of a Texas brevet. I was dubbed 'Colonel' in Galveston and was fully invested with the title by the time I got to Houston. I shall write home to my friends of this new rank and promotion."

The reporter said that it was rumored Wilde wished to visit the Honorable Jefferson Davis on his way from New Orleans to Mobile.

"I have an intense admiration for the chief of the Southern Confederacy," said Oscar. "I have never seen him, but I have followed his career with much attention. His fall, after such an able and gallant pleading of his own cause, must necessarily arouse sympathy, no matter what might be the merits of his plea. The head may approve the success of the winners, but the heart is sure to be with the fallen."

"The case of the South in the Civil War was to my mind much like that of Ireland today. It was not a struggle to see the empire dismembered, but only to see the Irish people free, and Ireland still as a willing and integral part of the British Empire. To dismember a great empire in this age of vast armies and overweening ambition on the part of other nations is to consign the peoples of the broken country to weak and insignificant places in the panorama of the nations, but people must have freedom and autonomy before they are capable of their greatest results in the cause of progress. This is my feeling about the Southern

people as it is about my own people, the Irish. I look forward to much pleasure in visiting Mr. Jefferson Davis."

With that Oscar bade the reporter good evening. He was off with "a party of gentlemen to witness some mysterious and curious ceremonies of the devotees of voodoo, which were to inaugurate the recurrence of St. John's Night, June 24th."

Vale, making arrangements, announced that his man would lecture Monday night at Spanish Fort, nearby, in the Pavilion, which could seat two thousand persons. The admission fee would be twenty-five cents. On Tuesday he would start for Mobile, stopping off at Beauvoir to spend a day with Jefferson Davis.

The city, reading all this in the *Picayune* on Sunday morning, warmed even more to the young Britisher, and he was lionized all day Sunday and Monday. One thousand persons were in the Pavilion when he spoke on "The House Beautiful." Poor acoustics kept a great part of the audience from hearing him, and at the end of thirty minutes he concluded the speech.

Next morning he left town, telling reporters that he wished soon to return. His stay in the city had been delightful.

8

In his home at Beauvoir, Jefferson Davis, aged seventy-four, tall, very thin, his Civil War reputation dwindling steadily, waited for the Britisher. He had waited for Britishers before in his life-time. He had spent the years 1861 to 1865 waiting vainly for Great Britain to intervene and save the Southern nation.

At the end of the war, Jeff Davis, trying to escape through the damp dawn, had been captured wearing his wife's raincoat, and had been lampooned savagely enough to merit now the sympathy of a lampooned Aesthete. Imprisoned for two years, he had eventually been set free by his conquerors, and had lived quietly ever since. Now and then he had spoken out in criticism of things Northern generals had said in their memoirs of the conflict, but on the whole he had lived quietly, perhaps dismally, for he had failed in business, lost his home, and now lived in a house, Beauvoir, given him by a sympathetic friend.

Recently he had himself written a book about the Confederacy, and, to date, it was rumored to have sold twenty-one thousand copies. It had been both praised and condemned, North and South, for among his own people, many, perhaps a majority, still blamed him for mistakes during the war. He had emerged from military defeat with the crown of neither hero nor martyr. General Lee had been the symbol of Southern heroism,

not ex-President Davis. Yet everybody agreed Davis had been honest, devoted and patriotic. Only by comparison with Abraham Lincoln had he seemed deficient in patience and mastery of men.



#### SOME FANCY RIDING

*Feats exhibited at the National Convention of the League of American Wheelmen. "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper," June 18, 1881.*

An old man with memories of the Mexican War, the Senate, the Secretaryship of War, the Executive Mansion in Richmond—a worn old man, he stood on his porch by the sea waiting for the strange aesthetic boy from London.

Days passed. No Southern reporters cared enough about Jeff Davis to follow Oscar Wilde to Beauvoir and chronicle the meeting between

the two. No word about the visit came out of Mobile when Wilde appeared there on the following day, June 28th, to speak at Frascati, the amusement park near the water front.

All that came to the public was the news that "Oscar Wilde, after traveling over the greater portion of Europe and America, and speaking in nearly all the large cities, finds our Southern ladies the most beautiful."

And it was Wilde and the ladies, not Wilde and Davis, of which newspapers talked during the Aesthete's visit to Montgomery, famous as the first capital of the Confederacy. Arriving on the evening of the 29th, Wilde was taken to "the annual hop of the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity at the dancing hall of McDonald's Opera House," where "in the soft air of the June night, laden with the perfume of flowers . . . the young ladies were charmed with his splendid figure, polished manners, and pleasing speech," and where he "was charmed by the beauty and wit and taste of Montgomery's lovely daughters."

Lionized, as he had been in New Orleans, Wilde found himself surrounded by much of what Northerners had long called "Southern gush," and as one whom the North had also said was "full of gush," Oscar found it all very charming. A belle of the city, Miss Alsatia Allen, popularly known as "Miss Lila," caught the poet's eye, for she was beautiful and had recently been called "the loveliest member" of an amateur group that had played *Patience* in the local theater and in near-by Selma as well. It was the *Selma Times* which, a week later, revealed that Miss Lila had "completely captivated" Oscar during his stay in Montgomery. "The utter young Celt pronounced the lady the most beautiful he'd seen in the South, and he sought her society continually." To which the *Montgomery Advertiser* added, "To prove the sincerity of his admiration, Oscar has since presented the lady with his photograph, across which he wrote, 'To the most beautiful flower in the South.'"

To the South, and to the whole country as well, Oscar Wilde was forgotten as he went lecturing through Birmingham and other near-by cities, for, on the morning of July 1st, the newspapers and the people were talking about another personality more vivid by far.

"Guiteau executed!" read the headlines. It was bigger news than the death of Jesse James, or Longfellow, or Emerson.

Yesterday Washington had seethed, not only with the semi-tropical heat, but with the vengeance of the nation. Garfield's murderer was to die. Mobs pressed in morbid joy around the prison, mad for a sight of

the killer. All through the night of June 29th, when the belles of Montgomery had cooed around Oscar Wilde, an insane woman's screams from a near-by cell had kept Charles Guiteau awake till dawn.

Guiteau had been able to eat breakfast, to pray for an hour and to read aloud a poem he had written, "Simplicity and Religious Baby Talk." Then he had taken a bath and had begun weeping. From weeping he had gone to shrieking, "I'm going to be murdered. I'm God's man!"

At twenty-five minutes past noon in this last day of June, the steam whistle in the prison had blown, and the march to the scaffold had begun. Through the jeering, hooting crowds out in the street, Negroes had moved, selling lemonade and cakes.

Down the jail corridor, littered with privileged guests, Guiteau walked, white of face, but with his overbright eyes searching here and there for villains who might anticipate the gallows. Several attempts had been made, during his confinement, to kill him, and he wanted no more of it. Police and artillery-men with muskets opened a lane for him. At the scaffold his feet grew weak, and, half fainting, he was helped to his place. Outside, the crowd beat against the jail doors, breaking glass panels. The Reverend A. W. Hicks read a prayer. Guiteau's arms were pinioned. A jailer held an open Bible before his eyes and he read loudly from Matthew. Then, in the same strident tone, he gave a prayer of his own, a bitter prayer predicting that the nation would, by this act, "incur eternal enmity as did the Jews by killing my Savior. . . . The nation will go down in blood. My murderers will go down to hell. . . . President Arthur is a coward and an ingrate. . . .

"Farewell, ye men of earth!"

But he was not yet ready. First he must recite another poem he had written. Listeners caught the refrain:

I'm going to the Lord,  
I am so glad,  
Glory Hallelujah!

At last the black cap was on him, and as the trap fell the muffled words were still coming out, "Glory! Glory!"

While the news of all this—columns of it—kept telegraphers, writers, typesetters, awake that night, Oscar Wilde was lecturing in Columbus, Georgia, and, according to report, putting the editor of the *Times* to sleep in his orchestra chair.

The next day, his man Gray was in Macon pouring tall tales into

the ears of the *Telegraph's* editor: "At Rankin's Hotel in Columbus, an extra porter had to be engaged to assist in carrying the numerous floral offerings and autograph albums sent to Mr. Wilde. . . . Mr. Wilde and his colored servants went to White Sulphur Springs to spend Sunday and will be in Macon in time to lecture Monday night. Mr. Wilde does not lecture on Saturday nights. . . . Mr. Peter Tracy has gone on to Atlanta where Mr. Wilde is to lecture on the Fourth of July. Atlanta is so excited that the manager of the opera house there had refused an offer of \$700 for the lecture."

The Macon editor had heard a rumor "that the coming Oscar Wilde is not the genuine" and got Vale to deny this. On Sunday the editor observed, "Now that Guiteau is gone, there is hardly anyone crank enough to impersonate Oscar."

Gray spread the word that "over fifty dollars' worth of sunflowers were sold by colored boys on the day of Mr. Wilde's lecture in Mobile," and was rewarded on Monday evening by seeing his propaganda work so well that not only were boys hawking sunflowers on the street when Oscar came to Macon, but children and young ladies were carrying them at the railroad station.

Through crowds waving sunflowers Wilde rushed from Brown's Hotel to Rolston's Hall on this night of July 3rd, to find only "a moderately sized audience." The *Telegraph* thought the temperature, "grazing among the nineties," partly responsible, but that the cash customers had been "not pleased" with one who was "no lecturer, only an overly advertised curiosity."

## 10

Negroes were shrieking, laughing, shooting off firecrackers up and down Atlanta's streets on Tuesday, as Oscar Wilde "stalked with measured tread" from the railroad depot to the Markham Hotel. This was the Fourth of July, and hard on the ears. Furthermore, it was the Fourth of July in Georgia, and the heat was oppressive.

Oscar entered the arcade of the Markham, "advanced to the radiator and came to a halt." A reporter from the *Atlanta Constitution* saw him "pose there, one hand seeking the spot where his heart was supposed to be, the other hanging by his side. His head was thrown back, his long locks hung over his shoulders, and he gazed upon the frescoing in the ceiling apparently oblivious of the curious gazes that were directed toward him." The *Constitution* had well advertised his coming, and, on June 20th, had published the statement of his advance man, Frank Gray, that Wilde had so far earned "about \$30,000, nearly all of which

is profit. He has little chance to spend money, as he is lionized everywhere."

His secretary registered, then came for him, and he was shown to a room on the second floor "kept especially for aesthetes." The *Constitution's* man sent up his card while Oscar was being dusted by his valet. When the reporter entered, Wilde was seated in a rocking chair, his wide-brimmed black hat and ivory cane lying on the bureau. The French novels and books of poetry were already out and scattered about the room. Through the open windows came the boom of firecrackers and the yells of the happy Negroes.

"Oh, the patriots, the patriots; let's shut down the window and shut out the noise," said Oscar, rising and slamming down the sash.

"This the first Fourth of July you ever saw in America?" asked the reporter.

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"I don't think," said Wilde, "that anything so fine as the Declaration of Independence should be celebrated at all if it cannot be celebrated in a very noble manner. Amongst the most artistic things that any city can do is to celebrate by pageant any great eras in its history. Why should not the Fourth of July pageant in Atlanta be as fine as the Mardi gras carnival in New Orleans? Indeed, the pageant is the most perfect school of art for a people."

"You have been to see Mr. Jefferson Davis lately. Tell me something about your visit to him."

"He lives in a very beautiful house by the sea amid lovely trees. He impressed me very much as a man of the keenest intellect, and a man fairly to be a leader of men on account of a personality that is as simple as it is strong, and an enthusiasm that is as fervent as it is faultless. We in Ireland are fighting for the principle of autonomy against empire, for independence against centralization, for the principles for which the South fought.

"So it was a matter of immense interest and pleasure to me to meet the leader of such a great cause. Because, although there may be a failure in fact, in ideas there is no failure possible. The principles for which Mr. Davis and the South went to war cannot suffer defeat. I had read Mr. Davis's book, which is a masterpiece, although to us in Europe the elaborate detail of military maneuver is at times a little burdensome. But there are passages in which he dwells on the principles of the Southern Confederacy that were read by us with the keenest interest and delight. It is impossible not to think nobly of a country that has produced Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington

and Jefferson Davis. . . . It should be—the South—the home of art in America. . . . The South has produced the best poet of America—Edgar Allan Poe—and with all its splendid traditions it would be impossible not to believe that she will continue to perfect what she has begun so nobly. The very physique in the South is far finer than that in the North, and its temperament infinitely more susceptible to the influences of beauty."

That night a new brass band "played some pretty airs" at De Give's Opera House, while waiting for Oscar, and the *Constitution* thought the address "an agreeable surprise," but what interested it more was what one of its reporters learned by following Wilde to the train.

"Oscar Wilde's agent appeared at the union ticket office and asked for three first-class tickets to Savannah and for three sleeping-car tickets; after Mr. Thweatt had supplied the agent's demands, the agent stated that one set of the tickets was for Mr. Wilde's valet, a colored man. Mr. Thweatt informed the agent that it was against the rules of the company to sell sleeping-car tickets to Negroes and requested the return of the ticket, promising to refund the money, but the agent declined to do as requested.

"Mr. Thweatt went into the sleeping-car and stated the case to Mr. Wilde and his servant. They both declined to change the program they had marked out. Mr. Wilde said that he had never been interfered with before and persisted in having his darky retain his sleeping-car ticket. Seeing all argument useless, Mr. Thweatt approached Steve Henderson, the porter, asking his aid. Steve went to Mr. Wilde's valet and told him the train would soon pass through Jonesboro, and if the people saw a Negro in the sleeper they would mob him. This had the desired effect; in a short time the sleeping-car ticket was returned and Mr. Wilde's valet had vacated the berth."

Weary from the heat and from constant lecturing, Wilde saw little of Savannah beyond the small "but intelligent" audience which he confronted in the Savannah Theater the following night, July 5th. The St. Andrew's Society had sponsored the event, not with success, if there was truth in the advertisement which ran on July 8th in the local newspapers:

OSCAR WILDE

Could not please the Savannah public, but

JACOB COHEN

of 152 Broughton Street can, as he has sent us  
since being in New York, the best and cheapest  
assortment of DRY and FANCY GOODS ever seen.

An appearance in Augusta on the evening of July 6th was likewise depressing, the total receipts being \$200.50, while Wilde's guarantee stood at \$200.

Furthermore, the South was commencing to weary of Wilde's flattery, an Augusta editor observing, "He wins most of his applause by complimenting the South as the home of beautiful flowers and beautiful women."

## 11

Charleston, second city of the South, and still first in social matters, was almost empty of fashionable folk when Wilde arrived at noon on July 7th. They had fled the moist heat by this time of year, and purely undistinguished persons saw the Aesthete enter the St. Charles Hotel, looking, all said, like Buffalo Bill. A reporter from the *Charleston News and Courier* was whistling the latest Oscar Wilde song as he went up the stairs for an interview:

Oscar dear, Oscar dear,  
How utterly, fluttery utter you are;  
Oscar dear, Oscar dear,  
I think you're awfully wild, ta-ta.

He saw Wilde sucking rum and lemonade through a straw and attempting to keep cool. The papers had said Wilde drank Rhine wine cobblers in Macon.

*Reporter*: "You've seen a good deal of the Southern people. What do you think of their capacity for aesthetic culture?"

*Wilde*: "Well, you see, one can travel through a country and see so very few of the people. It's awful when one realizes how few people one knows in the world; but upon the whole I'd rather travel through a country rapidly. . . . I like the Southern people, although you've let the Northern people get ahead of you in art. . . . You have magnificent forests, beautiful flowers; what you want is more diversity. I saw in your paper today that two carloads of furniture have been bought for an infirmary here and brought all the way from Chicago. Now, why shouldn't you make that furniture here in Charleston? . . . The mission of true art is to make us pause and look at a thing a second time. At Atlanta all the girls that passed the hotel wore sunflowers, and at Mobile an enterprising little boy made twenty-five dollars selling sunflowers to the people who came to my lecture. That boy will be a Congressman yet."

An attendance "only fair" greeted Wilde as he lectured at the Academy that evening, but the *News and Courier* critic thought it

included almost all the society folk left in town and was, altogether, "probably the most attentive, respectful and thoroughly appreciative



"THE BICYCLE NUISANCE—SUPPRESS IT"

*Cartoon in the "Daily Graphic," New York, September 2, 1881.*

that Mr. Wilde has addressed in America." It departed, at the end, issuing "murmurs of approving comment."

Wilmington, which was next, thought his hour's speech handicapped by "his incessant drawl" and Norfolk, which heard Wilde the following night, July 10th, in Van Wyck's Academy, supplied only a small audience and one that disliked his delivery. Norfolk's poet,

Mr. Harry Harrington, had burst into song at the approach of the Aesthete:

Oh, Oscar Wilde, oh, Oscar Wilde,  
     You darling too-too utter child,  
     Why should you come sae many a mile  
         Frae home to lecture?  
     The lovesick maidens ye beguile  
         Past all conjecture. Etc.

Richmond appeared outside Wilde's train windows on July 11th, but Oscar was in such haste to escape the heat and be off for the cool summer resorts of New England that he paid little attention to the city which held endless shrines of the Confederacy that he had so lately been praising. For all his boasts, down in Atlanta, of the interest an Irishman felt in the late Southern cause, he did not remain to see the home, the office, the walks of President Davis, nor the entrenchments where General Robert E. Lee had held out so incredibly against superior forces during the war.

If Wilde was uninterested in Richmond, the city returned the compliment, for a scant two hundred patrons gathered in the Richmond Theater the evening on July 12th—"some of our best citizens and a residuum of small potatoes of the male sex," many of whom, according to the *Richmond State*, imagined Wilde's "flowing locks to be a part of the theater's stock wardrobe."

The lecture, as the *Richmond Whig* viewed it, had gone none too well. "The little table from which the apostle orated had its wrong end turned toward the audience, showing the violent displacement of a drawer." Wilde had not arrived until nearly nine o'clock, and the *Whig* disliked his lisp, his "horse-head," and thought him "by no means so comely as Buffalo Bill." It heard a woman say Wilde looked like Meg Merrilies, that mountain hag seen in the popular drama *Guy Mannering*.

The one burst of applause came when Wilde, delivering his tribute to women as the nourishers of aesthetic principles, set the chivalrous males to putting up "vociferous acclaim."

The Southern trip was done. Lyceum experts, piecing together the newspaper reports of meager audiences, concluded that Peter Tracy's "Southern enterprise" had not paid him well. His guarantees to Wilde had been too high.

Wilde, however, was not depressed, for even with receipts diminished during the past month, he had earned gross profits of \$21,946.56 since commencing his American tour. Of this, \$6,183.57 was his own share. With all expenses paid by his managers, Wilde had averaged

over \$1,000 a month clear profit in a half year's work, a sum which placed him high in the ranks of foreigners lecturing in America.

Wilde entrained for the North, for New England where, as the newspapers had been announcing all summer, he was to visit Henry Ward Beecher and Julian Hawthorne, whom he had met in London.

12

While his secretary clipped newspapers, Wilde turned through the sheets. The miles clicked off beneath him. The summer heat lay on Virginia. His eye roamed through the torn-out pages that had been saved for his scrapbook.

May 22, Menlo Park, N. J.: Edison says electric lights are cheaper than gas. A lamp burns for 600 hours and costs \$1.

May 26, New York: Patti, when asked if she did not fear assassination during her proposed concert tour of Russia, answered, "Afraid, not a bit of it. The Russians can always get another Czar, but never another Patti."

May 29, St. Louis: Governor Crittenden of Missouri has been negotiating for ten days with Frank James, and within a week the noted outlaw will surrender and be pardoned.

May 29, Chicago: Numerous young and middle-aged men are on streets and in hotels in knee breeches, long hose, and caps of various colors. It was suggested they were converts to Oscar Wilde's idea of dress, but in reality they are bicyclists attending the National Convention League of American Wheelmen; 250 clubs are expected by tomorrow; 2,500 names now on rolls of League. Last year 900 attended the national convention in Boston. Eight years ago there was not a bicycle in America, now there are nearly 13,000. Cincinnati alone has almost 100. In England there are 20,000 in use—6,700 in London alone. There is no danger in bicycling except from carelessness.

May 30, New York: Robert J. Burdette, who has been lecturing steadily for the past six years, say, the best lyceum hall is the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. "Even when it's empty, you can't make an echo in that building with a gun. The worst hall is the court house in Carlinville, Macoupin County, Illinois. If you hit a bass drum in that building, you can hear it for ten years."

June 2, Washington: Joe Wheeler, lately Confederate cavalry general, has been unseated in Congress by rival claimant. Contest decided today. Joe, who is short, thin, and weak-voiced, mounted revolving chair to make valedictory speech. Well-oiled chair-screw revolved under impulse of his oratory and precipitated him into arms of his neighbors.

June 2, Philadelphia: Walt Whitman entered on his 64th year yesterday in his quiet Camden home. A stroll along the road, a trip in a horsecar to the ferry, a ride on the quiet little Delaware River ferry between eight and nine o'clock, is his daily humdrum schedule.

June 3, Rome: General Garibaldi died yesterday on the island of Capera.

June 3, New York: Wages in American industry average 10.8 per cent more than in 1880.

June 4, Boston: Livery-stable men of New England say extension of telephone lines from village to village is hurting their business.

June 6, Washington: Colonel John G. Nicolay and Colonel John Hay are preparing a biography of President Lincoln.

June 6, Boston: When the late Mr. Emerson visited England he went on Sunday to church at Stratford-on-Avon and sat near a statue of Shakespeare. At the end of the services, he sat rapt in thought. A friend tugged at his arm, saying, "The sermon is over." "The sermon?" asked Emerson. "I didn't know there had been one."

June 9, London: Henry Irving and Ellen Terry are coming to America in the autumn. They are said to be devoted to each other, and when they get divorces enough they are going to be married; she has had two or three already, and he one or two.

June 9, New York: Italians here are preparing to buy and turn into a hospital for aged Italians the cottage on Staten Island where Garibaldi lived three years.

June 14, St. Joseph, Mo.: Mrs. Jesse James is not lecturing with much success. The Governor of Missouri has restored to her her husband's weapons.

June 14, Jersey City: Newly arrived immigrants are taking over the jobs of longshoremen and freight handlers now out on strike.

June 21, Cincinnati: It is stated that Miss Anna Dickinson and Miss Susan B. Anthony are to appear on the stage together next season in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Miss Anna is to take the rôle of Much Ado and Miss Susan will appear as Nothing.

June 21, Washington: General Sherman has kissed more girls than any man in the country.

June 21, Washington: Bret Harte is to continue as U. S. Consul at Glasgow.

June 24, Washington: Mrs. Emma D. E. N. Southworth is leaving her cottage at Georgetown for her summer home at Yonkers. Although always battling consumption, she has written no less than sixty-five novels, most of them large two-volume editions. Her first novel ap-

peared thirty-five years ago in the *Saturday Visitor*, published in Baltimore; it was *The Irish Refugee*.

June 29, Des Moines: Temperance victory in Iowa. Constitutional amendment carried by upwards of 40,000.

June 29, Chicago: "The Lillian Russell Rage! How a Chicago Girl is Doing Up the New York Swells. She is setting New York wild, scores of young men in swell clothes crowding the Bijou Theater to stare at the pretty Patience. Miss Russell is about twenty-six, I believe; is married, has a husband who is a hard-working orchestra leader. He taught her to sing when she started in *The Snake Charmer*. Now she is suing him for divorce. Howell Osborne, son of a wealthy banker, recently followed her to Chicago, but his parents retrieved him and sent him to Paris."

July 1, New York: Paddy Ryan, loser in the Sullivan fight, has been equipped with Dr. A. H. Parker's Retentive Common Sense Truss, and now endorses it.

July 11, Washington: Wiring the Wretch! Guiteau's bones are being polished and strung together by the anatomist at the Museum, preparatory to being put in a glass case. Guiteau did not want his body to fall into the hands of showmen and asked science to have it. There are many requests for pieces of his coffin, his robe, etc., the curious trying to bribe attendants to obtain the souvenirs.

July 15, Chicago: Illinois Humane Society has arrested owners of slaughterhouses on Archer Avenue for putting out eyes of cattle before killing them.

July 15, Chicago: Minnie Maddern scores success in *Fogg's Ferry*.

July 16, Springfield, Ill.: Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln, widow of the late President, died yesterday from diabetes, boils, carbuncles, and paralysis. She had been insane for some time. She will be buried July 19 beside her husband.

## 4

### IMMORTALIZED IN CRAZY QUILTS

COLONEL MORSE debated what to do with his star. The regular lecture season was over. The lyceums had their summer courses completed long ago.

The Colonel and D'Oyly Carte cast their eye on the society folk, the rich people of New York, who were packing their trunks for journeys to the vacation resorts. Those people would soon be looking for entertainment in the long summer evenings. Oscar Wilde was due at Peekskill to visit Henry Ward Beecher around the last of the month of July. Why not work him through the resorts on easy schedule, taking what bookings came? There would be a little money in that.

So, as Morse admitted, "It was suggested that some knowledge of the American summer life at the watering places would be of interest to Mr. Wilde as continuing his study of the American people under different aspects and surroundings."

Newport, most high-toned of the resorts, was the first to see the famous Aesthete; Newport, whose luxurious mansions, hotels, sports, and dress set the summer fashion for the rest of America.

Wilde saw there the estates of the First Families from the seaboard, the fabled residences of the Astors, the Goelets, Pierre Lorillard, August Belmont, the Havemeyers, the Van Rensselaers, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte from Baltimore, Fairman Rogers of Philadelphia, W. R. Thorn, grandson of Vanderbilt—and of James Gordon Bennett's sister, Jeanette Bell, whose \$50,000 cottage was going up close to the publisher's estate while the publisher's paper, back in New York, was attacking Newport's sanitary conditions.

Wilde could see, too, the intellectual colony, in which were prominent the homes of Professor Alexander Agassiz of Harvard, and of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, and, apart from any coterie, the mansion of Miss Caroline Wolfe, living along with many servants on a reputed income of \$150,000 a year.

New mansions, more lavish, more extravagant, were rising as the new rich, "the Shoddyites," crowded in, eager to prove by the mere spending of cash how clear was their title to social position.

Past these architectural dreams of scroll-saw carpenters, Oscar Wilde could see the ocean, the harbor dotted with the sails of pleasure boats, and the smokestacks of private yachts, and the beach to which bathers went down in their modish creations.

Neither sailing nor bathing was as new a craze as indoor polo played on "parlor-skates with boxwood wheels" in the rink which had lately been built. Polo on horses was said to be not so exciting. But sport on roller skates was itself less thrilling, in the summer of Oscar Wilde's visit, than lawn tennis, that recent innovation whose national tournament was yearly staged on the Newport grass courts, and whose champions were now R. D. Sears in singles, and R. D. Sears and James Dwight in doubles. The game had become a thing to be taught the

masses as well as the classes. Popular magazines and daily newspapers were printing instructions in the new sport. *Godey's Lady's Book* was observing that "during the last two seasons it has taken a very high stand in popular estimation. With a gentleman it ranks almost as high as billiards." Sternly, *Godey's* warned its readers: "Practice is required to master the game," although it held out the enticing thought that "experts are in great demand at parties." Special etiquette was



### NEWPORT

*A scene at Newport five years before Oscar Wilde visited it. The "Daily Graphic," New York, June 23, 1877.*

necessary as well as rules for the game: "A hostess, seeing some of her young lady guests looking wistfully at the game, and noticing that they have brought their rackets, asks one or two young men to play with them."

*Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* wove romance around lawn tennis: "The court is a dangerous place for the unmated eligible male. Hither comes the would-be mother-in-law with her willing-to-be-mated daughter." Particularly was Newport dangerous, for "lawn tennis at the Casino courts, a walk to Fort Adams, a lounge on the piazza of the Ocean House, with the band playing a waltz, a bowl along the ocean drive, a cottage hop—and Edwin is Angelina's as sure as the moonlight will play on gables of the late Charlotte Cushman's aesthetic little villa."

To the polo field, on the 15th of July, came Oscar Wilde, chaperoned by Sam Ward. It was the opening game of the season, and the large grounds of the Westchester Polo Club were lined with fashionable equipages, while from tents pitched in flower gardens elegant folk watched languidly, seeing more but caring less than did the common folk who cheered lustily from their segregated standing-room on "Dead-hill Hill." James Gordon Bennett, as a champion of the barbaric commoners, had insisted upon them having this vantage-point.

Both crowds, the gilded nobles and the outlanders, gawked with equal frankness at Oscar Wilde as he sauntered across the grass under a great white slouch hat.

That night he lectured in the Casino, where, as the *New York Sun* reported, he was heard "by the most fashionable audience that ever gathered within the walls of the theater." Lady auditors stirred when, after delivering his stock castigation of ugly hats and artificial flowers, he said he hoped none of them wore such atrocities. He dared even to point directly to the antiquated ornaments beside him on the stage—plaques, vases, screens, and china bottles. Newporters felt pleasure when he spoke well of those resorters who had painted their houses in color.

With his hearers, Wilde stayed, after the lecture, for the Casino Ball, and was invited by naval officers—those eternal lions of Newport—to dine on board the gunboat *Minnesota*.

More eager was he, however, to see, once more, his defender, Julia Ward Howe. Her brother, Sam Ward, arranged the meeting as of old, and Mrs. Howe went so far as to ask the Britisher to stay a couple of days. Her daughters told how the household had been "thrown into a flutter by the advent of Wilde's valet. It was one thing to entertain the Aesthete, another to put up the gentleman's gentleman." But Wilde, they said, "proved a rarely entertaining guest. He talked amazingly well. In that company all that was best in the man came to the surface."

Under the trees, he recited one of his poems for the company, and, as rumor soon had it, he remarked while sitting on Mrs. Howe's veranda, "Strange that a pair of silk stockings should so upset a nation."

A male guest, sitting apart from the circle, spoke up, "It's the calf that's in the calf that's in the stocking."

There was much to talk about, notably Mrs. Howe's libretto for a light opera, *Lord Buncombe's Daughter*, soon to be given in Newport.

Through the resort ran the rumor that Oscar was working on a play between social functions. And as he flitted to other watering places and other homes, the same story persisted. He was, as a matter of fact, trying to shape up his tragedy, *The Duchess of Padua*, although society was too brisk and Oscar's habits of composition too leisurely for much progress.

Wilde's hosts granted him creative hours to himself, when he would make his careful revisions—revisions of the kind which caused Robert Sherard to record how Oscar "had occasion to tell his host one evening that he had spent the day in hard literary work, and when asked what he had done, he said, 'I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma.'

"‘And in the afternoon?’

"‘In the afternoon?—Well, I put it back again.’"

### 3

Wilde passed on through the summer homes. He was seen at West Point, driving with his hostess, Mrs. John Bigelow, and on Saturday, July 29th, he alighted from the 7 P.M. train at Peekskill, where as he drove off in a hack, a boy shouted, "Three cheers for Oscar Wilde." Oscar was on his way for the long-awaited visit with Henry Ward Beecher. But his stay was not to be for the month or for the summer, as newspapers had announced early that spring. It was only for the week-end, and an unsensational one at that. No tales of brilliant dialogue, no epigrams, no anecdotes, came to the newspapers from this conjunction of stars.

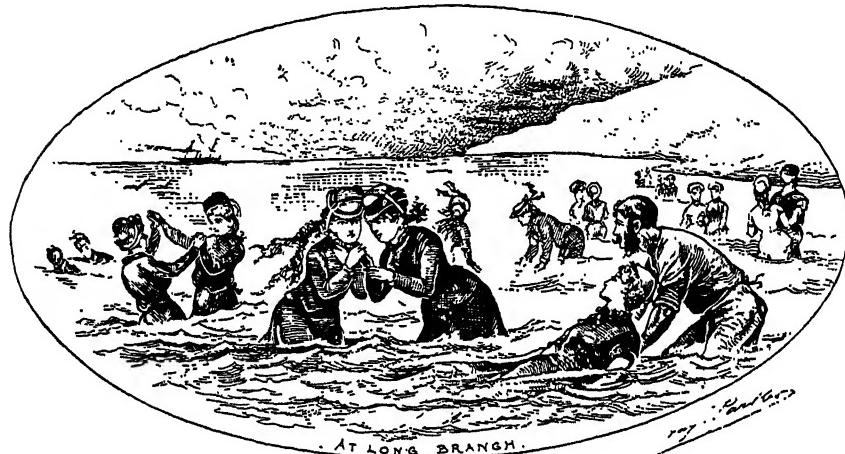
Week by week, Wilde was reported as on view in this or that resort, and as having stopped the busy rocking-chairs in their piazza rocking as his carriage drove up to hotels. "It's Oscar Wilde as sure as I'm alive," the whisper would run down the length of the promenade. Then there would be a levee and very soon a lecture.

Sam Ward brought Oscar to Long Branch, the *New York Tribune* noting that the poet wore "a light Scotch suit," carried an umbrella under his arm and had on "a broad white straw hat" as he came strolling through the crowd "with a look of childish pleasure." Sam headed him for the bar, where it was quickly rumored he was being urged to try an American cocktail. Ladies peeping in over the little swinging door saw, however, that the Aesthete was drinking beer, and they turned away saying, "How vulgar."

On August 9th he spoke in Gould Hall at Ballston Spa, New York, to what the village *Journal* thought was "a small but appreciative

audience." Wealthy and educated guests were in the large hotel for the resort's medicinal springs and Oscar received polite attention. The *Journal's* editor, Reverend H. L. Grose, sent his "lady reporter" to cover the lecture, and she came away in such transports that she wrote of Oscar as "some knight of the ancient days of chivalry whose flowing hair and beardless face reminded one of the prince-musician who played so entrancingly to the Sweet Lalla Rookh in Moore's *Eastern Tale*."

She straightened out America on the sunflower business; Oscar had said young men should never wear it in their buttonholes.



BATHING AT LONG BRANCH

*"Daily Graphic," New York, summer of 1877.*

Saratoga, the most famous of American spas, saw him on August 10th as he sauntered into a lavish suite at Congress Hall, a huge hotel which disputed for supremacy with the Grand Union, the United States, and the Windsor.

"The long corridors shake to the tread of millionaires," a reporter was saying about these caravansaries. A Wall Street broker boasted that he could from his veranda chair see twelve men whose assets totaled \$300,000,000. Freddie Gebhardt, the most eligible of society bachelors, was there with his horses, and W. H. Vanderbilt was driving his newly bought champion mare, Maud S., up and down the main street. Society reporters were dividing "the drama of Saratoga" into five acts:

- (1) Drinking water at the springs in magnificent demi-toilettes.
- (2) After-breakfast flirtations on the piazza in morning costumes.
- (3) Races and drives in the afternoon in afternoon toilettes.

- (4) Dinner and music in full dinner costume.
- (5) Moonlight supper at the lake or balls in magnificent evening attire.

The *Daily Saratogian* told its readers Oscar was there, "a new kind of half-breed; a kind of cross between Buffalo Bill and an utterly-utter school girl." Lady resorters followed him whenever he left his rooms, followed him so diligently that he complained that "ladies in silks and crêpes and laces, with diamonds in their ears, bringing their daughters with them," chased him to the billiard room, out of it, into the bar-room and out of that.

"Why didn't I say, 'What'll you have, ladies?'" he asked the interviewer to whom he told this experience. "It wouldn't have done any good, and all the country would have said I had insulted the ladies at Saratoga."

As it was, he was denounced by the *Daily Saratogian* for having "made uncomplimentary remarks," and the editor wrote that "when a man makes a guy of himself he is a legitimate gazing-stock," also that Oscar confessed to the hotel manager that "it paid." This same sharp-penned editor amused his summer readers by reporting a rumor that Wilde would ride down the main street on the back of Jumbo, though "some innocent-minded people, thinking Oscar was the larger of the two, were said to be believing that Jumbo would ride Oscar."

#### 4

This witticism bore earmarks of having originated with Eli Perkins (Melville D. Landon), the nonpareil humorist of many Saratoga seasons. Since Spring, when jokers had proposed that Perkins be sent to England in exchange for Wilde, the latter had felt some curiosity to meet him. They did meet at Saratoga on that August 10th so memorable in the town near which Generals Gates and Arnold beat the British. There was a party, guided, if not assembled, by W. J. Arkell, vice-president, and John McGee, superintendent, of the railway that crawled up Mount McGregor. The guests, besides Perkins, included the noted William M. Evarts, Attorney-General Palmer from Washington, Supreme Court Judge McArthur and Mrs. McArthur, a galaxy of young ladies, several married couples, and editors from both Saratoga and Troy, together with "Sophia Sparkle (Mrs. Hicks), the well-known correspondent." Fifty guests in all.

With great jollity they all rode up the mountain and gathered at the Overlook Restaurant, where a table was set on the east veranda. The flowers were ferns, cattails, and goldenrod. And the breakfast—for so

it was termed—offered salmon and pickerel, beef tenderloin, spring chicken, Spanish omelet, French pancakes, Pommery sec, and coffee with cognac!

C. E. Crouse, of Syracuse, managed to stand up after all that and act as toastmaster. He called upon Eli Perkins, who responded with a speech deemed illustrative of his style. It was reported in full in the *Saratogian*, as follows:

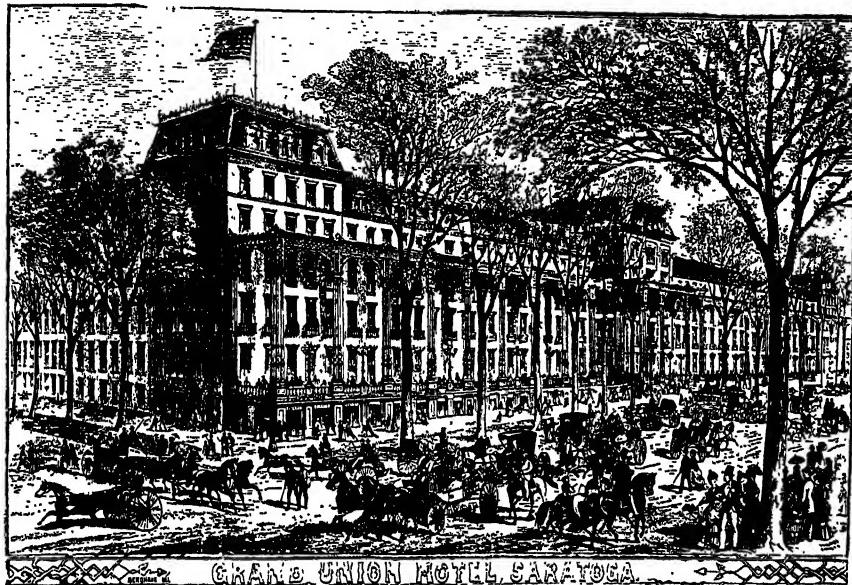
"Ladies and gentlemen: I am in a quandary as to how to introduce this great aesthetic poet to this table full of hungry guests. Aestheticism and hunger do not go together. Then, when I look around, I find that I cannot conscientiously introduce him to all of you because I do not know you all myself. It would be acting a lie. [Voice: You are at home now.] I would not do anything that would even imply an untruth. [Laughter.] Therefore I will introduce Mr. Wilde to such of you as I honestly know. I take pleasure in introducing to you, Mr. Wilde, that great Scotch lawyer and judge from Washington—Judge McArthur. Emory Storrs, of Chicago, tells me that this Judge of the Supreme Court is a great man. He wears a white necktie to denote his goodness and a celluloid collar to denote his frugality. [Laughter.] The idea is aesthetic.

"The gentleman at the Judge's right is our ex-Secretary of State, William M. Evarts. Mr. Evarts is an anti-monopoly man. He talks anti-monopoly daytime and monopolizes four young ladies every evening on the hotel balconies. [Laughter.] This is diplomacy. He is very hungry. He is always hungry, Mr. Evarts is. President Hayes often truthfully said of Mr. Evarts: 'My Secretary of State ate two roast turkeys at a cold lunch yesterday, and then apologized for not eating by saying it was early in the day and he was not hungry.' [Laughter.] One day after eating a whole ham, Mr. Evarts said he was just as well satisfied with that ham as if he had eaten a whole meal. [Loud laughter.] This was not aesthetic, but it was the truth. I love the truth. I love it so much that I never let it go out from me. [Laughter.] It is my constant companion—never leaving me for a moment. [Laughter.] Beyond Mr. Evarts and next to Mr. Crouse, who is said to be the greatest male flirt in Saratoga [laughter] is W. J. Arkell, the vice-president of the Mt. McGregor Railroad. He is a great man. He signed our passes over here. He discovered this mountain one thousand two hundred feet above the sea—nine hundred feet nearer Heaven than Saratoga. [Applause.] He is an aesthete. He allows none but the purely aesthetic to ride on his road. None but the pure and beautiful can ever come to Mt. McGregor—Governor Cornell excepted. [Laughter.] You men here are all pure. You love the lily. [Laughter.] The ladies

here are all beautiful. So I am glad to present you to the aesthetic poet —the lover of the beautiful. He loves America. He loves our eagle. He loves our double-eagles. [Laughter.] Ladies and gentlemen, I present you to Oscar Wilde. [Applause.]”

Oscar Wilde rose and said, according to the *Saratogian*:

“Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you very much for the lovely morn-



### THE PRIDE OF SARATOGA

*The Grand Union Hotel at Saratoga in 1874. Except for fashions in dress, the scene is substantially the one Oscar Wilde saw in the summer of 1882. “Daily Graphic,” New York, July 18, 1874.*

ing you have given me in this beautiful place, and these delightful surroundings. You all wear the distinctive badge of the order of the lily, and anybody who wears the lily is my disciple for life. One of the regular diversions of the order should be a breakfast every year at Mt. McGregor on a lovely morning like this. If there is anything more necessary than a good income, it is to have beautiful surroundings, and we have here today just the loveliest that could be: beautiful trees, beautiful landscapes, and above all, beautiful women.”

Mr. Arkell was introduced, but passed the palm to Judge McArthur. That weighty advocate responded:

“Having been appointed a regular disciple of the order of the lily, of which our distinguished guest is the representative and chief apostle,

I must of course respond. None but the aesthetic and beautiful are admitted to the order, and a committee would probably be appointed to consist of Mr. Wilde and myself to receive all applications for admission. Lady applicants must be beautiful in person, or mind, or heart, so they may be like the flower which is the emblem of the order. This beautiful outlook, this enjoyable banquet, this distinguished stranger, all offer themes for eloquence, but I shall forbear, and with the assurance that, as the court is now constituted, the lightest possible sentences will be imposed for all delinquency, I take my seat."

Attorney-General Palmer closed the speaking with "complimentary and appropriate remarks."

That evening there was no trouble in assembling a good crowd in the Congress Hall ballroom for Wilde's lecture. It was one of the best of his summer audiences, since there was authentic record that he cleared \$600. His success was not harmed by the fact that Clara Louise Kellogg and her concert troupe were in town, nor by the balloon ascension, that same day, of Mme. Carlotta, who performed the feat of floating six miles to a safe landing. Wilde's glory was undimmed by the *Saratogian's* prophecy that "his name will go thundering down the ages just about six months longer."

## 5

A trip through the Catskills with friends was followed by a lecture-visit to Long Beach, Long Island. Wilde's talks were becoming more and more informal, partly due to the environment. In the Long Beach hotel he spoke in the dining-room. There were restless children scampering about beyond the rows of chairs, and a buzz of voices came through the windows from the piazza. Despite this he discoursed for a half hour about good and bad furniture, the need of teaching children artistic taste, beautification of railway stations—the familiar themes. He complimented the old furniture he had seen in New England and the South. Moreover, he had read in the newspapers of "a war supposed to exist between your capitalist and the man who is working for him." And though admitting the problem was outside his field, he said, "I do believe that if those laborers who have covered the deserts with a network of railways, who have filled your harbors with the galleys of the world, were more honored, if labor were set up in enduring monuments in your railway stations, you would hear very little about that enmity."

On the train from Long Beach to New York a *New York Sun* man espied Wilde in company with Steele Mackaye, the noted dramatist,

actor and inventor. The reporter thrust in front of the poet a clipping from the *New Orleans Times* quoting him as having pronounced Miss Alsatia Allen, of Montgomery, Alabama, the most beautiful young woman he had seen in the United States.

Oscar chuckled. "That is a remark, my dear fellow, that I have made of some lady in every city in this country. It could be appropriately made. American women are very beautiful, and some of the finest types of beauty I have ever seen I found in the South.

"But it is in the decay of manners," continued he, warming up, "that the thoughtful and well-bred American has serious cause for regret. I have repeatedly said this, but I am told in reply, 'We are still a young country; you must not be too severe upon us. Where we are raw and crude now these finer arts will come with time.' 'Ah, yes,' I answer, 'but when your country was still younger, its manners were better. They have never been equal since to what they were in Washington's time—a man himself whose manners were irreproachable!' I believe a most serious problem for the American people to consider is the cultivation of better manners among its people. It is the most noticeable, the most painful, defect in American civilization."

He was going, he said, to Japan, where manners were a fine art. And then:

"Next to Japan is France, where, in spite of frequent revolutions, good manners have reached a strange degree of perfection. If you visit France, do not waste your time in Paris among the ruined monuments of the empire, but go into the villages and the remote country hamlets and note the instinctive politeness of the peasant, who will convince you that you have honored him and honored his country by coming into it.

"The Englishman abroad is in the main a man of good manners and an agreeable companion. I am a Celt, but I can tell the truth about him. At home the average Englishman is arrogant, ill-tempered, and tied down by prejudices which nothing will induce him to lay aside."

## 6

Long Branch (a second visit) and Cape May were other scheduled stops as the summer waned.

Wilde continued making remarks which contained more truth than discretion. A dispatch dated September 11th had this to report:

"Oscar Wilde was complaining at Cape May the other day of the high prices of things in this country. 'My gloves, for example,' he said, 'which I might have bought for a dollar in London, cost \$2.50 here.'

'So they ought,' exclaimed ex-Mayor Stokley of Philadelphia, who was in the room. 'They are luxurious.'

"Luxurious, sir?" echoed the Aesthete in wide-eyed amazement; 'do you call gloves luxurious? How would you go on the street, how could you travel in the railroad cars, without gloves?' 'Do you see these hands?' returned Mr. Stokley warmly; 'before I became mayor of Philadelphia I worked so hard at my shop that my hands became all



LONG BEACH

*"A Scene at Long Beach, the New and Popular Resort—From a Sketch by a Staff Artist."* Mrs. Frank Leslie published this in her weekly, August 12, 1882, to illustrate a society item about Oscar Wilde and Sam Ward with others at the beach. Wilde, in a bathing suit, stands in the center, with Ward seated on the sand behind him.

covered with corns that you might have cut with a knife; and those hands, sir, have never had a pair of gloves on them. And you talk about work! Why, it's good for you! I've worked nearly all my life, and I weigh 220 pounds.' 'I will take your word for it, Mr. Mayor; I will take your word for it,' gasped the horrified Aesthete. He let the subject drop, but afterward he made some minute inquiries about Mr. Stokley's career with a view to basing thereon a chapter in his forthcoming book on America."

It was admitted everywhere that, critic though he was, Oscar added greatly to the animation of the resorts. Moreover, he was making many new acquaintances. At Long Branch, it was guessed, he had his brief

meeting with General Grant, who made his summer home at the resort. It was possible to encounter such celebrities informally in the bland atmosphere of summer. And as for lecturing, Oscar was now "at his best," Colonel Morse observed. "He had no longer to depend upon his manuscript, but varied his talks to suit the occasion, and often to suit the audience. . . . The afternoon meetings, when his audiences were ladies in charming toilettes, were a source of inspiration to the speaker, and were responded to by the enthusiastic yet subdued applause of his hearers. They sparkled with wit, epigram and metaphor; the illustrations were drawn from his own observations and later experiences; the high intelligence of his audiences, appreciative of his best efforts, incited him to flights of fancy and oratory not reached before."

It could not have damaged his style to learn that among the women who embroidered and stitched on the hotel piazzas were many who were making the season's rage, the "Oscar crazy quilt." An expert described the method in part as follows: "On a piece of cambric half a yard square there is basted in the center a sunflower made of either yellow broad-cloth, silk, or velvet; or else a lily, daisy, or pansy. The squares are filled with bits of silk or velvet of all colors, the edges turned in, and the piece is sewed down firmly with a chain stitch of old gold color, alternating with cardinal sewing-silk." Thus, the writer added, "Oscar Wilde is immortalized in silk quilts, to be handed down to generations yet unborn, heirlooms of what grandmamma did when she was a girl."

The poet's sojourn among the aristocrats and "idlers" was doing him no good among the New York editorial writers, the *Tribune* saying on August 18th under the heading "WHY WE LAUGH" that Wilde was touring the summer hotels "in the wake of the professional reader, the ventriloquist, the bird-charmer, the trained dogs, and the tragedian who reads selections from *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Lear*, all for a slight consideration. . . . Wilde and his clique deplore giggles of young persons in the audience—call it 'ill breeding.' They ought not to be distressed; they ought to realize that the American people do not take him seriously.

"When they see a man with feminine countenance, long hair, dressed in velvet, leaning in 'stained glass attitudes upon a desk' droning forth such sentiments as 'The loafer and the idler are always ungraceful' . . . what else can a young American girl do but laugh?"

On the hotel tables lay newspapers which Oscar Wilde might read, fresh newspapers, old newspapers, back copies mailed from home to vacationists:

July 17, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*: Oscar Wilde is talking at Newport. He says the bathing dresses are so bad in architecture and off color that they make him sick.

July 22, Newport, R. I.: A Chicago girl here for the resort season writes home, "We're just as gay as a cockatoo's topknot down here, and you can just bet I'm a hummer with my duds. Them New Yorkers is awfully stuck up, making believe they come from Philadelphia."

July 25, Richmond, Va.: Captain John S. Wise and John S. Crockett fought a duel with pistols yesterday. After missing Wise three times Crockett declared himself satisfied.

July 25, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*: Mr. Oscar Wilde in the East, says he never could study geography, the colors on the map were so discordant, and distressed him so much. On that point of aestheticism he will find the youth of the country with him, though we never knew before just what was the matter.

August 2, New York: The Republican Attorney-General considers dropping the income tax case against Samuel J. Tilden, who, six years ago, ran for President on the Democratic ticket.

August 3, *The Nation*: A clown says the best days of the circus are over. Funny men now go into journalism. The press makes a business of supplying daily the kind of jokes which clowns used to produce.

August 4, Brooklyn: Dr. Talmage attacks extravagance of American funerals. He says, "A first-class, New York uptown funeral costs \$1,876, one-half of this going for a casket."

August 17, Washington: Cabinet Secretaries Robert Lincoln and Teller refuse to appoint women to clerkships, the objections being that women are sick more often than men, are more difficult to keep in good discipline, and ask for favors more persistently and unreasonably.

August 21, Cincinnati: The late Jesse James and Charles Guiteau never used tobacco or whisky in any form. They had no small vices.

August 22, Boston: General Benjamin Butler objects to the Chinese on the ground that "their good qualities render their presence injurious to our country."

August 24, New York: Much comment in society on the news that a Mr. Farquhar, young London clubman, has come on the stage emulating Mrs. Langtry. *The Nation* says, "Society is nothing more than the organized pursuit of pleasure, but now that it has become recognized that a great part of the pleasure consists of being seen in the act of taking it, and that Society has become a show, it has a great many opportunities it never had before. The aesthetic tour of Oscar Wilde under the management of a showman who also ran a burlesque of him,

gives us a hint of what we may look for in the social world. Mr. Wilde took up aestheticism much as Mrs. Langtry and Mr. Farquhar are taking up the stage. Mr. Wilde's whole capital as a reformer comes from Society, which first took him up as something odd, then caricatured him into notoriety."



## B O O K F I V E

*"I WOULD RATHER HAVE DISCOVERED  
MRS. LANGTRY . . ."*

### I

"THE PUBLIC BE DAMNED!"

WITH summer gone, another lecture season began, and the D'Oyly Carte organization, studying the map, writing letters, telegraphing, gauging the market, was soon able to hand Oscar Wilde a new schedule. It was nothing very imposing nor strenuous, but sufficient to bring a few dollars into his—and the managers'—hands:

Providence, Rhode Island, September 26th; Pawtucket, Rhode Island, September 28th; North Attleboro, Massachusetts, September 29th; Bangor, Maine, October 3rd; then Canada—various dates for New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

For this new minor campaign Oscar shifted his base to Boston where, if there was less Puritan denunciation of him than there had been eight months before, he was still a sight for street throngs.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich and his wife, traveling homeward by train one day, noted a crowd gazing through a car door at a man in a light brown overcoat, yellow silk waistcoat, blue tie, lemon-colored gloves, and sitting beside a green morocco bag.

"What's all this?" someone asked the conductor.

"Oh, I suspect it's just curiosity to look at Oscar Wilde," replied the trainman.

Oscar was not displeased that curiosity in him persisted. Even more satisfying was a visit to the dormitories of the youths who had lampooned him so sensationaly upon his first visit to the city. It was a triumph, indeed, for Wilde to be taken by friends through Harvard rooms which showed how many youths were now embracing the aestheticism which they had so lately mocked. The Boston correspondent of the *Providence Journal* wrote his editor on September 20th that, during the visit, there was "more than one room at whose beauty even

the scoffing and cynical Oscar uttered expressions of surprise and pleasure.”

Wilde made himself agreeable to his Boston society friends with witty anecdotes about the South, the one region in America which many Bostonians regarded with dislike and disdain—a hereditary feud. Nor did the Britisher hesitate to improve upon the facts. He told listeners how “all over the South people sang in his ears the old melancholy refrain, ‘You ought to have seen it before the war.’

“I was once sitting on the portico of a country house with a young lady admiring the beauty of a limpid stream under the rays of the moon, and I said, ‘How beautiful is the moonlight falling on the water!’

“‘It is beautiful indeed,’ she replied, ‘but, oh, Mr. Wilde, you ought to have seen it before the war!’”

## 2

As he passed through sections outside Boston, he could see with fuller understanding how general and how tremendous had been the New Englander’s passion for reform. If Boston itself were not so aggressive as in other times for moralistic crusades, the stern regions outside it were still active.

Bangor, Maine, was not to be passed without some hospitable citizen telling a visiting lecturer about the town’s great tradition, Dr. Henry A. Reynolds, who was known to the army of American temperance zealots as “Old Business,” the most practical of them all.

“I believe everything between the two lids of the Bible whether I understand it or not,” Dr. Reynolds always said, and he, perhaps as much as any man, had been responsible for a change of profound importance in the course of the temperance movement—its marriage to evangelical religion.

Up to the early 1870’s the foes of Demon Rum had relied upon reason, materialism, and dollars-and-cents arguments in their pleas for drunkards to sign the pledge. The Washingtonian Total Abstinence Society, organized in Baltimore in 1840 and quickly becoming the great driving force in the anti-liquor movement, had been so careful to avoid religion and the charge of being “goody-goody,” that church people accused it of “coldness to Christ.” Its lecturers had achieved their success by ridiculing bartenders and by “giving imitations of the antics and fooleries of men under the influence of liquor.”

So amusing were the Washingtonian speakers that the society was able to boast, two or three years after its birth, that it had cut the an-

nual consumption of hard liquor in America from an 1831 average of six gallons per citizen to less than three. And by 1860 it had bragged that it had persuaded as many as one hundred and fifty thousand drunkards to sign the pledge. It had grown strong in politics, flanked as it was by imitative societies, notably the Sons of Temperance. To aid the cause during the 1840's and 1850's had come many Abolitionists who were themselves officially frowned upon by the orthodox churches. Several Quakers, regarded as “not quite Christians” by the Trinitarian faiths, added temperance to their crusades. Neal Dow, the mayor of Portland, Maine, had been one of these, a man so persuasive and politically shrewd as to have his State in 1851 outlaw the liquor traffic. A wave of similar legislation had swept the country, only to be abandoned almost as quickly, New York, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Delaware, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Michigan having all been in and out of prohibition by 1856.

The Civil War, apparently killing interest in such reforms as temperance, had, in reality, created and stored up forces which made inevitable the subsequent revival of the anti-rum crusade. In ratifying the Abolition movement, morally and politically, the war, at its end, had brought respect to those female Anti-Slavery agitators who, in earlier years, had been called “unwomanly cranks.”

In giving women new authority and duties in the farms and shops which men had deserted for the battlefield, the war had widened opportunity for the sex. In massing women in the countless relief societies which forwarded an immense tonnage of supplies to the soldiers, the war had taught women the power and pleasure of organization. And in giving place to female nurses with the armies, the war had raised up a crop of women who, having tasted authority and the cheers of thousands of men, were not disposed to go home, after Appomattox, and cook for any one man. Ex-nurses were conspicuous, after the war, in the women's organizations which began to consider the drink habits of so many ex-soldiers.

With the sex established in public life as lecturers, in moral life as reformers, in social life as club women, temperance had found friends much more earnest and capable than the male Washingtonians. By 1873 “The Praying Women” had appeared in Ohio, with so many members kneeling in saloons and invoking God's curse upon startled bartenders that the whole nation was soon agog over “The Women's Crusade.”

From this, in 1874, had come the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which now in 1882 had over sixty thousand members and tremendous moral force. Before its blasts, the churches bent quickly, readily. Clergymen and deacons who in the old civilization had not, as

a class, forsaken liquor, had taken to shouting as loud as the ladies, “John Barleycorn Must Go!” Churches, sensing their loss of power in the post-war swing to materialism, seized upon temperance as an aid to religious revivals. Many Protestants of the old native stock took up Prohibition as a convenient weapon to use against the new floods of European immigrants whose customs and religions they did not like. It was more seemly to rail against the beer-drinking habits of foreigners than to attack openly their racial and religious peculiarities.

Dr. Reynolds in Bangor, Dwight L. Moody in Chicago, and Francis Murphy in Portland, Maine, had been powers in the new work of making the devil and John Barleycorn one and the same. Evangelists found new popularity in making the acceptance of Jesus identical with the signing of the pledge. Murphy had been immensely successful, describing his horrible experiences to panting thousands, telling how as a servant in the South of Ireland in the late 1840’s he had been taught to drink by his tipsy master, how he at sixteen had emigrated to Portland in 1852, fought Dow’s laws, drunk up his hotel at the bar, served a three months’ jail term in 1870, and been sobered by the death of his wife. In 1871 he had begun to lecture on his awful past, found himself to be an orator, and in 1874 had been brought West by Frances E. Willard to save Chicago. Touring the country with a rich harvest of pledge-signers, he had been imported by John Wanamaker to conduct, in 1877, a combination religious-and-temperance revival in the merchant’s Sunday-school. And other large employers of labor had found it profitable to use his tongue to divert workingmen’s minds from the strikes which were impeding the industrial progress of the nation.

More famous than Murphy in the massed ranks of temperance lecturers was white-bearded John B. Gough, who since the 1850’s had been celebrated in England as well as in America. Trained in the technique of the Washingtonians, Gough had never quite abandoned the device of ridiculing drunkards more than praising Christianity, but in the years after the war, he had aimed more and more at the female public.

Gough had come to New York City as a British immigrant boy in 1822, had sung songs for a living in low grog shops, had tried to be an actor, had failed, and had settled down to a dual profession—binding books and drinking rum. After both his mother and his wife had died of what he later would sadly boast was heartbreak, he had been enjoying delirium tremens in Worcester, Massachusetts, when in October, 1842, an old Quaker, who had done him a kindness, had asked him to sign the pledge.

More to please the old man than anything else, Gough had obliged

and started off tramping about the country, picking up meals and coins by doing his comic songs and impersonations in barns and halls instead of barrooms. At imitating and ridiculing the one class he knew



“YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME . . .”

*“You have deceived me . . . I smell it on your breath.” Illustration for one of the most effective anecdotes told by the temperance lecturer, John B. Gough, and reproduced from his book, “Platform Echoes: or Living Truths for Head and Heart.”*

best, drunkards, he was a great artist, and was immediately recognized as such. His mimicry of himself seeing snakes was a masterpiece, and soon he found the reformers eager to help him in what they told him was his life work. Before the year was out he had given three hundred and eighty-three lectures, and by 1870, had been earning \$350 a night, speaking almost daily during winter seasons. In that year he reckoned

his total listeners at more than five million and was gratified to hear Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson say, “You are not only an actor, you are a whole dramatic company.”

Among Gough’s shrewdest oratorical genuflexions toward the race of women was one story which, among his countless anecdotes of amazing comic and pathetic success, was especially effective—the tale of the Independent Bride. Gough would work up skillfully to this incident, addressing himself, ostensibly, to the men in his audience:

“You may chew peppermint till you are sick, and pastilles and all sorts of things to take away the smell of the drink upon your breath, but others know what you have been at. That odor of alcohol is wonderfully pungent.

“I heard—and I say this for the benefit of the ladies—of a young lady who was engaged to be married. Before she gave her consent, she made the young gentleman promise that he would drink no more intoxicating liquor. They stood up before the minister to be married. He turned his face to her to give her his right hand, and she detected the smell of liquor on his breath.

“The minister said, ‘Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?’

“Looking him right in the face, she said ‘No!’

“‘Why, you came here for that purpose?’

“‘I did!’ Then she said to the young man, ‘You have deceived me; you have told a lie. You said you would not drink, and I smell it on your breath; and the prospects for me, if I become your wife, are so dreadful that my own safety and future happiness demand that I shall say No.’”

### 3

In the wholesale newspaper publication of Dr. Talmage’s sermon of October 15th, Wilde might easily have seen how openly the temperance agitators had abandoned the Washingtonian appeal to men, and were now putting all their trust in the weaker sex.

“The women carried Iowa and Kansas for state prohibition,” Talmage was shouting. “The women will yet carry the United States for national prohibition and God. Every man who has a wife is influenced by her. . . . There are 1,000,000 drunkards in the country; 100,000 are annually sent to prison, and 200,000 children each year thrown on the world, victims of the Red Dragon. . . . Officials say eighty-five per cent of all criminals owe their fall to drink.”

Frances E. Willard was having her W.C.T.U. exhorters repeat what

she insisted Chicago's judges had told her, "Seven-eighths of the crimes grow out of strong drink. Do away with whisky and our prisons will be closed." The W.C.T.U. and temperance societies generally were putting tremendous pressure upon the medical profession to join the crusade, Dr. Talmage even going so far as to declare, "All physicians are for prohibition." In 1879 Frances Willard and fellow executives of the W.C.T.U. had come to believe that it was "easier to form than to reform," and had set out to educate children on the evils of drink. Soon they noticed that it was only the Sunday-school children whom they reached, and to correct this situation they began calling upon public schools to incorporate temperance propaganda in the curriculum.

This course had been advocated earlier by the National Temperance Society and Publication House, which had been organized in 1865 by agitators and reformers lately put at liberty by the success of the national crusades against slavery and secession. So great had grown this publishing company that in 1882 it had almost three hundred "first-class writers" on its list, and over one thousand books, tracts, journals, lesson-leaves, songbooks, not to speak of pledge cards, floral cards, and printed mottoes, all at the service of Sunday-schools. To invade the public schools had long been the National Temperance Society's plan, but it took the driving power of Frances Willard and her organized, relentless women to force school boards to open their doors.

Not until 1882 did the W.C.T.U. feel safe in calling for direct action in the matter, but when it did, Vermont quickly passed a law requiring schoolmasters "to give special prominence to the effect of alcoholic drinks, stimulants, and tobacco" in elementary physiology classes. And New Hampshire and Michigan were preparing to follow suit. Publishers of textbooks, seeing the handwriting on the wall, were inserting brilliantly colored and horrendous pictures of drunkards' stomachs into physiologies, and Julia Colman was publishing that year, 1882, her catechism on liquor and tobacco for distribution in the three leading temperance organizations of juveniles: the Bands of Hope, the Cold Water Army, and the Juvenile Union. Very complete were the questions Miss Colman provided for club leaders, and very emphatic the answers she supplied the catechized child:

*Question:* How is alcohol obtained?

*Answer:* By the process of decay.

*Question:* What is decay?

*Answer:* It is rotting.

*Question:* What is wine?

*Answer:* Grape juice decayed.

*Question:* Is there alcohol in gin?

*Answer:* A great deal more than there is in beer.

*Question:* Will alcohol prevent frostbite?

*Answer:* It will not. Drinking men are much more likely to freeze and die than are sober men.



#### THE FIRST DOWNWARD STEP

“‘You know I don’t drink wine,’ said young Harry Doe, coloring deeply.” Illustration for the temperance story, “The Bravest Girl in the World,” published in “The Youth’s Companion,” August 11, 1881.

*Question:* How many men are killed by the use of alcohol in this country?

*Answer:* 60,000 every year.

The canny editors of *The Youth’s Companion*, most popular of juvenile weeklies, had begun in 1881 praising that new creation which

science had first exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in 1876—the soda-water fountain. This “purely American” invention was admired by temperance workers as an antidote to the saloon. The New York Business Men’s Society for the Encouragement of Moderation had, in 1880, set up at the City Post Office, on the Park Row side, “an ice fountain” where weak mortals could so fortify themselves as to be able to thumb their noses at saloons on a hot day.

*The Youth’s Companion* during 1881 had struck hard for temperance in Mrs. J. D. Chaplin’s pious fiction tale, *The Bravest Girl in the World*, the story of Robina, a banker’s daughter who had decided herself too brave to put up with her parents’ old-fogey hostility toward wine.

With the water pitcher displaced and the champagne bottle enthroned, Robina had been faced with a problem, for her mother wished her to wed Harry Doe, the bookkeeper who, as Mrs. Chaplin said, was “a lovely doll man, as innocent as a child, and as affectionate as a girl, having seen little of the world beyond the counting room.” Mrs. Chaplin did, however, warn her readers that whereas Harry “was loyal to his mother and sister, and true as steel to his employer, he was not remarkably strong-minded.”

That Mrs. Chaplin had not exaggerated was soon revealed. At their engagement supper, Robina, the brave girl, had cried to her fiancé, “Now you and I will pop our first bottle of champagne together and drink to a blessed and happy future.”

“But you know I don’t drink wine,” said the young man, coloring deeply.

“Champagne isn’t wine, you young greeny!” laughed Robina, and before Mr. Doe knew it, his prospective bride had several drinks down him.

That night, at home, Harry asked his mother if it were not true that the pledge he had taken in boyhood “had been voided at his twenty-first birthday.” His mother admitted as much, but expressed a hope that nothing had come up to make him weary of his oath. He replied he wasn’t exactly weary of it, but he didn’t think he’d care to renew it.

The full pity of all this was soon apparent, for after his great church wedding to the heiress, Mr. Doe “withdrew his support and caused his widowed mother and dear sister to go back to the farm,” while he took to drinking, not only with Robina, but with the chaps, and as Mrs. Chaplin frankly put it, “began to have fits, and now is in an asylum for imbeciles,” while the wife of the once lovely doll man went on through life scorned by all good people and thinking ruefully of her boast that she had been the bravest girl in the world.

Although Canada, which now lay ahead of Oscar Wilde, was not so stormy with the temperance reform, it was far from being the liberal land of an aesthete's dream. Two days after Oscar left Providence, Rhode Island, the *Journal* of that city had told how Ontario's minister of education had forbidden the study of Scott's "Marmion" in public schools. It was too immoral!

The *Journal* had commented: "It may be a satisfaction to know that all sense of literary modesty has not departed from an age in which Walt Whitman's poems are issued by a respectable publishing house, when Oscar Wilde is admitted into respectable society, which, it may be hoped, is ignorant of his verse. . . ."

With no trace of dismay, Wilde entered the Dominion and in Halifax, on October 8th, made bold, in an interview with the *Morning Herald*, to take "immoral" literature by the horns. Walt Whitman, he told the reporter, had a power "grand, original, and unique." He went on to Poe's greatness, and then branched to a discussion about the beauty of North American women. They were pretty, he said, "especially in the South, but they will not be so in ten years. Their prettiness is in color and freshness and bloom."

That led the reporter to ask whether Mr. Wilde was not the discoverer of Mrs. Langtry, who was on the eve of sailing for New York. Oscar broke out:

"I would rather have discovered Mrs. Langtry than have discovered America. Her beauty is in outline perfectly modeled. She will be a beauty at eighty-five. Yes, it was for such a lady that Troy was destroyed, and well it might be destroyed for such a woman."

The "discovery" epigram went streaking over telegraphs to many cities where editorial writers once more sharpened their pens for jabs at the London upstart. While they were inventing paragraphs, Wilde was wandering on across the Bay of Fundy to St. John, N. B., where he lectured October 13th, then on to Moncton, where he got himself arrested by the Young Men's Christian Association.

The details, as his friend Robert Sherard got them, were those of a blunder, not a misdemeanor. The Moncton Y.M.C.A. had offered Wilde's agent \$75 for the lecture, and this official, a Mr. Husted, had accepted, contingent upon receiving confirmation by a certain hour. This confirmation came too late, and Wilde, meanwhile, had accepted the offer of another group of Monctonites. Thereupon the Y.M.C.A. had sued for breach of contract, claiming damages of \$200. Husted offered

\$20 by way of compromise, and said he would pay their court costs. They refused.

To New York came a new report that Wilde had been "arrested"



"THE PUBLIC BE D—D!"

Vanderbilt, with an Oscar Wilde sunflower upon his lapel as lampooning symbol of his interest in art, is cartooned soon after his celebrated reply to questions about his railroad policy. "Daily Graphic," October 12, 1882.

and that "the case was settled on the payment of \$100 by Wilde." Here was meat strong enough for the Caesars of American newspaper wit, a paragraph fit for weeks of jesting. But a bare mention was all it received, for William H. Vanderbilt saved Oscar.

Early on the morning of October 8th, the railroad emperor, accompanied by two sons and an uncle, was at Michigan City, Indiana. Traveling in three private cars, the party was going West to inspect the Vanderbilt lines that spun like spiders' webs across the country. As the train halted at Michigan City, two newspapermen came aboard—Clarence Dresser, a free-lance space-writer, and John Sherman, a *Chicago Tribune* staff man. They hoped to secure interviews by the time the train reached Chicago.

Vanderbilt agreed to talk.

They asked him about the Nickel Plate road, which had been reputedly built to blackmail the New York Central into buying it. Vanderbilt snapped, "It's no good; poorly built." They asked him about the new train he had instituted to cut the New York-Chicago run to twenty-four hours. "Does it pay?"

"No; not a bit of it," he answered. "We only run the limited because forced to by the action of the Pennsylvania Railroad."

Dresser pushed him further, saying, "But don't you run it for the public benefit?"

"The public be damned!" Vanderbilt snorted. "What does the public care for the railroads except to get as much out of them for as little consideration as possible!"

The interview then flowed into less dangerous channels, and as soon as the train reached the Chicago terminal, the reporters hurried away, Dresser making for the *Chicago Daily News*, where he gave a swift summary of what he had to Colonel Nate Reed, who sat at the desk.

"Shall I write it just as he said it?" concluded Dresser.

"Yes," answered the editor; and when Dresser began to worry about the cuss-word, Reed definitely ordered it in.

The edition of next morning appeared with the story solidly set under modest headlines:

MR. W. H. VANDERBILT  
THE MAGNATE TALKS FREELY  
HE DEPRECATES THE NICKEL PLATE  
RAILROADS ARE NOT RUN FOR THE DEAR PUBLIC

Far down in the narrative was the quotation "The public be d—d."

Across town the *Tribune* was quoting Vanderbilt as having said merely "Nonsense" in place of the damning sentence. Yet when Vanderbilt, hearing the violent storm of denunciation that arose all over

America, denied ever having said it, the *Daily News* reproved him sharply. On October 13th it announced, “Two reporters were present and their notes agree almost exactly.”

Vanderbilt’s inspection trip was a miserable one. The roar of an angry America deafened him wherever he stopped. The press, the clergy, the politicians, were upbraiding him roundly.

“I never said it, and that’s all,” he growled as New York reporters swarmed around his special at the conclusion of its unhappy trip on October 17th. “It’s a malign misrepresentation. That is not my way, nor was it my father’s. I never use profane language.”

This added mirth to the nation’s scorn, for William H. was always telling how like his father he was. Cartoonists, paragraphers, said he was always hanging to the coattails of the old Commodore.

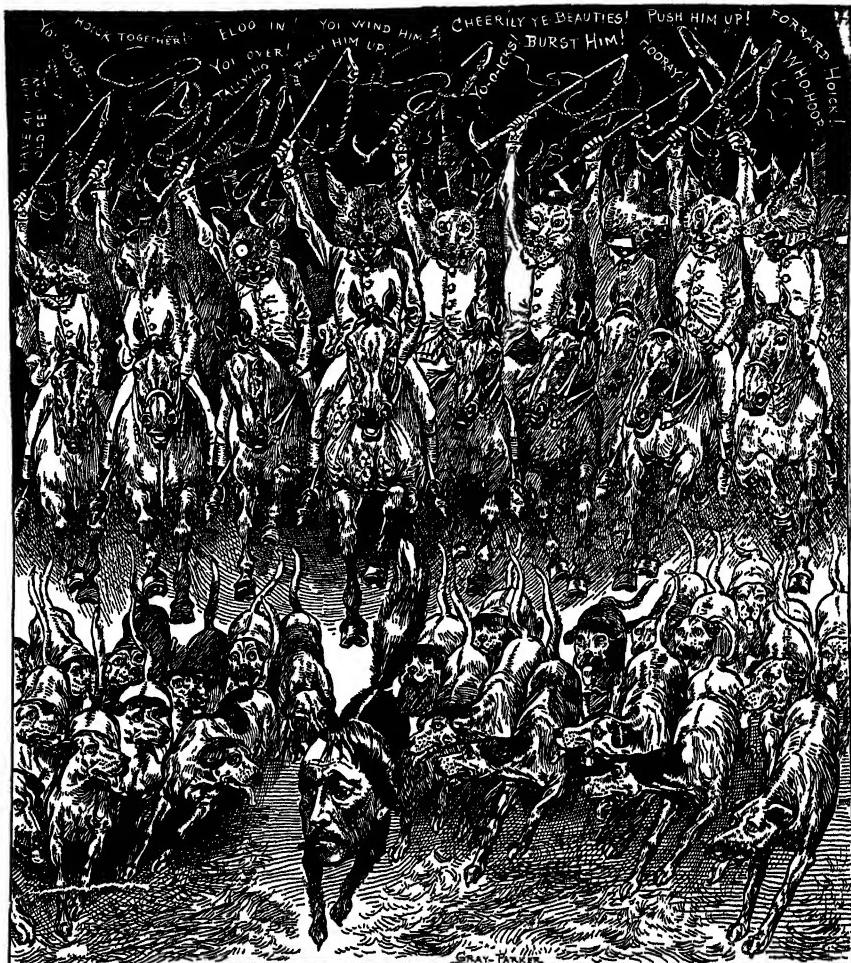
All the Anti-Monopolists, all the Greenbackers, all the remnants of the Grangers, all the farmers who said railroads had cheated them, all the workingmen who still muttered to themselves about the railway strikes of 1877, all the legislators who wanted to raise railroad taxes—all of these and many hitherto neutral Americans said that Vanderbilt had summarized the philosophy of a whole industry. Sections of them said it did more than that: It summarized the attitude of the Standard Oil Company, of the steel magnates, the coal barons, the grain speculators, the Chicago packers, the Western mine owners, big employers everywhere.

In Boston, cockeyed, Anti-Monopolistic, Greenbacking Ben Butler rejoiced, knowing how much Vanderbilt had helped him in his gubernatorial race which would be settled now within a few weeks. In Buffalo, Grover Cleveland, stalwart and no radical, could not help but see how Vanderbilt had made hundreds of thousands of votes for the Democrats.

Down in his office in the *New York Herald* Joe Howard, Jr., the drama critic, sent to his Western newspaper clients his bitter views: “Vanderbilt’s idiotic phrase, ‘Damn the public,’ comes at a most infelicitous time for him and his. It comes at a time when juries declare him guilty of criminal negligence, when the public and press denounce him and his as usurpers, and when the general mind is revolving carefully but surely the problem of whether such men are to be tolerated. . . .

“You can have no possible conception of the growth of the wealth of the metropolis, nor the terrible condition of penury, destitution and squalor in which so many thousands of New York’s citizens are living. . . . Common sense teaches me that the excesses which led to the uprisings in France are likely to come to the beautiful Manhattan, which is covered today by the excessive prosperity of the one class and the terrible destitution of the other.”

Cooler heads, however, knew that no French Terror was waiting to engulf poor Vanderbilt as it had engulfed that earlier bungler, Marie



## HENRY BERGH'S DREADFUL DREAM

*"Daily Graphic," New York, October 25, 1882, makes merry over Bergh's failure to halt fox hunting, and imagines him hounded by the very animals he has so conspicuously protected.*

Antoinette, when she told the public to eat cake. Prosperity was already returning, after long years of absence, and Americans had not killed their Tories in the Revolution over a century before. The principle had been fixed. America was not Europe.

Oscar Wilde was in no mood to remember how Gladstone had told him America's danger lay in its rich men. Wilde would have been very glad indeed to have had one of America's rich men back *Vera* for a New York opening that autumn. In October he was preoccupied with stage hopes. Hopes, if not for *Vera*, for the new piece, *The Duchess of Padua*, which he had begun during summer weeks. At all events, Oscar, as playwright, had found a new lady to woo, and she was inclined to smile upon him—as playwright. His spirits, so often laid low by rebuffs, bounded back to the heights.

Mary Anderson was playing in Boston when Wilde paused there on his way toward Canada. The twenty-three-year-old actress was impressed with his talents and was intuitive enough to discern genius where many others had seen only an amateurish flair for the theater. They had discussed *Vera*, but in the end it seemed not as promising as *The Duchess* as Wilde outlined it. So confident was Oscar that from Halifax he wrote to his friend Steele Mackaye a letter full of enthusiasm. This missive, which seemed to betray expectation that *Vera* would find a stage home, read:

“Mary Anderson has written to me, accepting you as director and supreme autocrat (I think that over the ‘supers’ you should have the power of life and death—we will have no serious dramatic art until we hang a super), offering to take Booth’s Theater for October, and to get a good young actor for the hero, and indeed she seems most willing to do everything requisite for our success. She is simple and nice, and the Griffin must have his claws clipped.

“I will see of course that in our contract you shall be named as the man under whose direction the play shall walk the stage. I will be back in about a fortnight; and we will settle matters about the *Duchess* and about *Vera*. Any and all of your suggestions will be most valuable. I am glad you like it and if we can get Miss Mathers it will be a great thing.

“Pray go over the play carefully, and note on the blank interleaf your changes, so that over the walnuts and the wine at some little Brunswick dinner we may settle everything.

“I long to get back to real literary work; for though my audiences are really most appreciative I cannot write while flying from one railway to another and from the cast-iron stove of one hotel to its twin horror in the next.

“I will be at the Vendome Hotel, Boston, on Sunday next. Send me a line there to say how things are going with you.

“Remember me to Frank Piersson, and believe me,

“Very truly yrs,

“OSCAR WILDE.”

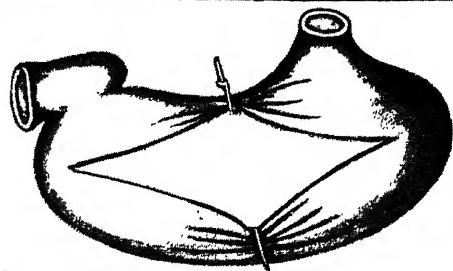
That Miss Anderson accepted Mackaye as “director and supreme autocrat” betrayed to Broadway the fact that the poet and the apostle of Delsarte were busy with joint plans. The two were congenial in many respects, although Mackaye was nearly twice Wilde’s age. Both loved gay anecdote, persiflage with a literary flavor, and good dinners. And both were idealists about the stage.

Within a few weeks the wind started blowing away from *Vera* and toward *The Duchess*. The latter was clearly better suited than the former to a setting in which Mary Anderson would shine. A contract was drawn up, under the eagle eye of Hamilton Griffin, Miss Anderson’s stepfather and manager (“the Griffin” of the letter). It was a contract for a play not yet complete. Its terms, when revealed to a few people, seemed to them generous. Wilde and Griffin were the two signers. The poet agreed to write for Miss Anderson “a first-class five-act tragedy,” and was to complete it on or before March 1, 1883. The play was to become the property of “Miss Mary Anderson and her heirs forever,” and Wilde agreed “never to interfere with said tragedy after it became Miss Anderson’s property.” Griffin agreed to pay Wilde \$5,000, of which \$1,000 would be in cash and \$4,000 be paid when Miss Anderson accepted and approved the script.

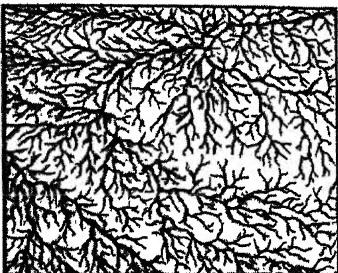
Despite the rosy outlook, Miss Anderson appeared in neither *Vera* nor *The Duchess*. Optimism on Oscar’s part was succeeded by disappointment. There were prophets who had said that nothing would come of it all. “The Griffin” was known to be sharply watchful about the interests of his youthful and brilliant stepdaughter.

The last resorters were hurrying back to the cities. Oscar Wilde returned to New York.

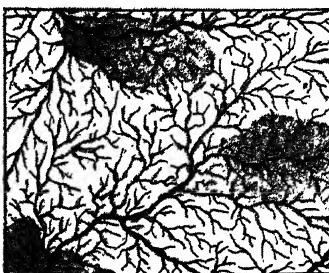
No reporters came to meet him. They had bigger fish to fry. The elections were soon due, Congressional and State, and the signs were all against the Republicans, who felt grave concern for the nation. They had ruled the country since the Seventies, and felt it their hereditary right, a feeling Eugene Field had expressed: ·



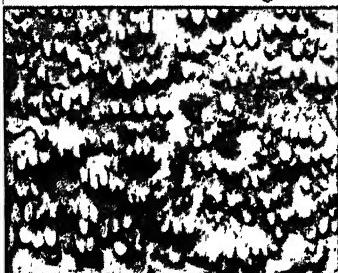
Healthful.



Moderate Drinking.



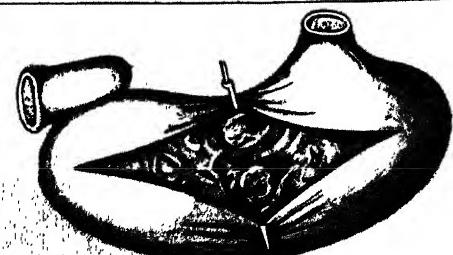
Drunkards.



Ulcerous.



After a long Debauch.



Death by Delirium Tremens.

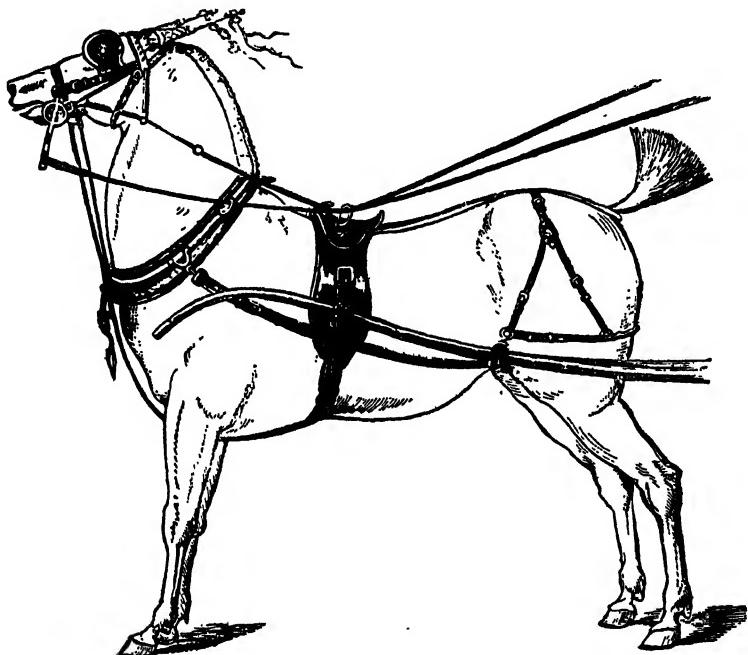
### THE DRUNKARD'S STOMACH

*Diagrams of the stomach in various conditions. From "The Temper-*



We'll run the country as we please,  
We saved it, and it's ours.

The first baseball games were being played on New York's Polo Grounds, with the Chicago and Providence nines locked in a series of nine games to decide the league championship. The East was cheering



“FASHION”

*Illustration of the barbarities forced upon carriage horses by fashionable swells. From “Horse and Man,” by Reverend J. G. Wood, Lippincott, 1886.*

for Radbourne, the wizard pitcher of the Providence club, the West was whooping for his rival, Corcoran. Chicago won and hero-worship was strong for its stars, Catcher Flint, he of the enormous misshapen hands; Shortstop Dalrymple, fleet as a deer; “King” Kelly, the mighty batsman; “Cap” Anson, Cyclopean first baseman—and Pfeffer, Burns, and Williamson.

Scanning the newspapers in his semi-obscenity, Oscar Wilde could note how people whose paths he had crossed were now more interesting than he:

Beecher was coming out for Cleveland for Governor.

Bob Ford was acquitted on October 26th of the murder of Woods Hite, that cousin of Jesse James, and would soon be free to roam the world as he chose.

Frank James had surrendered, October 6th, and promising permanent reform, was said to be assured of a pardon.

Lieutenant-Governor Tabor in Leadville was in trouble. It had just been discovered that he had divorced his wife as far back as March 24th in an obscure part of Colorado. Mrs. Tabor was suing to upset the decree, saying she had never been notified.

Guiteau, dead, was still greater in news value than Oscar, alive. On October 6th, the authorities in Washington were charging the assassin's sister, Mrs. George Scoville, with having tried to help Guiteau commit suicide with poisoned flowers. Guards had suspected a bouquet she had sent the day before the hanging, and Government chemists, completing an examination, now reported the leaves sugared with arsenic.

On October 27th, Mrs. Scoville was being declared insane by a jury, her son Louis having testified, “I regard her as crazy because she thinks she can lecture, write, and sell books.”

Even Doctor Henry S. Tanner, whose forty-day fast had been completed more than two years before, was still more sensational than a ten-months-old aesthetic novelty. America had just learned why the doctor's wife had left him—he had begun to experiment upon her instead of himself. He had made a bet with friends that he could prove his theory that carrots made people sly, turnips made them amiable and French beans made them irritable. Each day he had made Mrs. Tanner eat three pounds of French beans, and when, one morning, she had thrown a jug at his head, he had dashed off gleefully to collect his bet. Then he had come home and put her on a turnip diet to restore her temper. But before the turnips could take hold she had her divorce and was gone.

More interesting to Wilde, the lover of paradox and dabbler in reform, were the harsh things rich New Yorkers were saying about Henry Bergh, President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. For years, wealthy folk had supported him in his work of succoring distressed dogs, horses, cats, and cows, and now, in the midst of the autumn hunting season, he was trying to make American nobles quit the pursuit of foxes.

All year Wilde had heard of Bergh, who, it was said, was known by sight to every fourth person in New York. Yet not one soul knew

him intimately, this tall, rich gentleman whose high hat and frock coat made his long, quixotic face longer still. A heavy cane was carried in the hand that had never caressed a dog or horse in affection, but from under his sharp hat brim his melancholy eye played upon the street as he walked ominously along searching tirelessly for the sight of some animal in distress.

He had helped establish the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, but animals interested him more.

“He’s the law and the gospel in this town,” was what everybody said. The big bugs were back of him; every newsboy with a hidden bottle of turpentine and an eye watching for dogs, knew this very well. Bergh was rich, he lived on Fifth Avenue, and wealthy citizens supplied him with the funds and the influence that had made the flippant newspapers and weeklies temper the ridicule which had hounded him only a decade before. Magistrates now bowed before him.

For twenty years Henry Bergh had been hunting “cruelists.” Backed by Alexander Stewart, the merchant, Horace Greeley, the editor, and John Jacob Astor, who had made his fortune slaughtering and skinning furred animals, Bergh had, in 1866, wrung from the Legislature at Albany a law which upset the age-old right of a man to handle his domestic animals as he pleased.

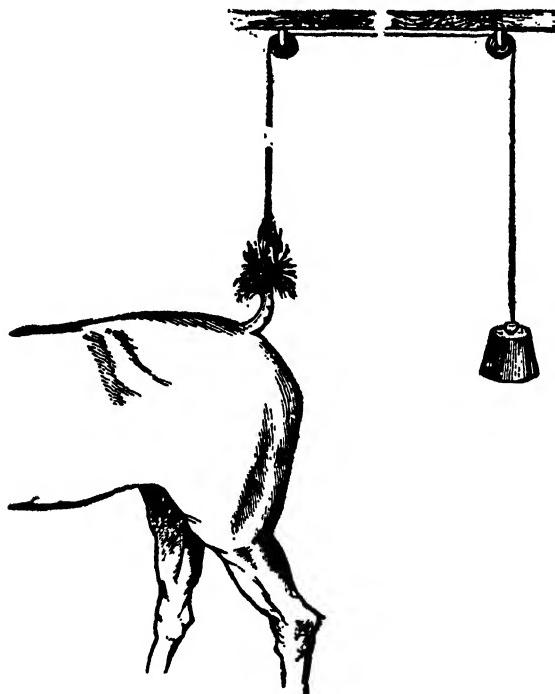
The very suddenness of his triumph meant slow victory, for nobody paid him nor his crusade much heed. Then one day help had arrived from the sea. Turtles destined for soup came to the wharf strung together by bonds piercing their flippers. Into court Bergh haled the turtle-man, only to have the judge, the bailiffs, the bystanders, and the *New York Herald* laugh at him. Ridicule was bitter, but publicity was sweet, and from that day the town knew Bergh. His Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals soon had agents to win court decisions against sportsmen who pitted dog against dog, rat against rat, cock against cock. Bergh made marksmen quit shooting live pigeons and start popping at clay ones. He put up water troughs for overheated dogs and horses. He dragged from cellars diseased cows which, fed on brewery slops, were stripped of “swill milk”—occasionally being suspended meanwhile from ropes and pulleys when too sick to stand.

His only failure was in working up sympathy for the fox. The rich folk who supported him thought that carrying things too far.

Bergh’s greatest triumphs were in rescuing horses from predicaments. He was the bane of conductors on horsecars, forever stopping them, making part of the passengers walk home while he lectured the drivers on the condition of their red-eyed, panting steeds. He made the wealthy

blanket their horses in winter, and in all weathers he would spring from the curb to see if they were using the infamous Burr bit.

This cruel affair was a round leather guard fastened at either side of the horse's bit, its interior so barbed with short spikes as to make the animal toss its head and fling foam most fashionably whenever the



“NICKING” THE TAIL

*Illustration from “Horse and Man,” 1886.*

reins were tightened. Bergh became the forefront of a crusade against those equine styles which reined heads uncomfortably high and stretched mouths two inches out of shape on either side. He denounced blinders that injured horses' eyes, singeing of hairs that caused deafness, over-check reins that distorted spines, and the docking and nicking of tails which meant, not only agony during the operation, but a lifetime of helplessness before the fiendish horsefly.

Docking a horse was to cut off, not only most of the hair, but several vertebrae in the tail, and to sear the stump with a red-hot iron. Nicking it was to cut through the remaining vertebrae on the under side so as

to sever the powerful tendon upon which the horse relied to keep its tail down. Then, to keep the tendon from healing, the stump was tied up and bent back with ropes and weights till the flesh wounds were healed. By the time the tail was untied it was up for life.

A visitor to New York would be sure to hear that most famous of the Bergh stories—the time he got the calf its dinner.

One day on the street he had caught a drover pulling a cow which mooed with the pain of a swollen and dripping udder, while behind it came a tiny calf, staggering with hunger. Up flashed Bergh's great stick, and despite the drover's pleas about being late for a sale, and the calf being worthless, there the cavalcade stopped until the calf, encouraged by the cheer of a quickly gathering crowd, had relieved both itself and its mother.

All through 1882, Bergh had been campaigning against vaccination, for with smallpox epidemic in large sections of the land, the medical profession was making headway with its plan to make vaccination compulsory, a thing that seemed cruel to the man who had done so much for animals.

## 10

While Oscar Wilde watched autumn pass, Americans talked of the comet, which hurled its monstrous length across the frosty heavens, awing the superstitious and delighting the scientific. Predictions that it would return in 1883 or fall into the sun and so wreck the earth, were scoffed at by cool heads like Professor Pickering of Harvard. Newspaper humorists prodded Jay Gould to fence the comet in and charge the world ten cents a head to view it.

Other paragraphers thought it mere advance notice of the coming of a meteor of the British firmament, one brighter far than Oscar Wilde. On October 17th, newspapers across the country had said:

“Lily Langtry has netted \$45,000 by her late provincial tour in England, and \$6,000 by her fortnight's tenancy of the Imperial Theater in London. She is to receive \$3,500 a week during her American tour, with all expenses paid.”

## 2

## “LILY OF LOVE, PURE AND INVIOLENTE”

AT half-past four in the misty dawn of October 23rd, Henry Abbey, brisk, black mustached, boarded the *Laura M. Starin*, a harbor boat which had lain all night at the New York waterfront waiting for him.

Abbey was exuberant. It had not been many years since he had left his home in Akron, Ohio, to work his way, managing theatricals in Cleveland and other midland towns, to his present situation as the most enterprising of New York's dramatic managers. It had been a scant two years since he had startled the theater world by bringing Sarah Bernhardt over for an American tour that rolled up gross receipts of \$200,000. Now he was bringing Lily Langtry to America, had engaged for her at the Albemarle Hotel the very suite used by Bernhardt, and was staging a reception which would launch her with all of Bernhardt's glamour. The small steamer which he was boarding was part of the plan. It was “the reception boat” upon which New York notables, men-about-town, and newspaper reporters were to be taken, through the dawn, out to Quarantine to meet Mrs. Langtry.

Many of the party had spent the night on the *Laura M. Starin* drinking and being cajoled by Abbey's representatives into a highly receptive mood. And now as Abbey prepared to push off, there were, all told, some thirty happy males assembled.

Almost the last to come aboard was Oscar Wilde, whom a *New York Times* reporter saw to be “dressed as probably no man in this world was ever dressed before.”

Nothing could have kept Oscar in his bed of indolence upon so glad a dawn. It was his “New Helen” herself who was coming. The first face from home in eleven long months was to be the one face that he idolized most. To it he owed much and had given much. By praising it he had won his first fame in London, by carrying a lily to its owner he had climbed out of obscurity.

Now, on the reception boat, he was carrying, not one lily, but many. Those of his fellows who had not noticed his bouquet as the boat shoved off and steamed away, saw them when Abbey summoned everybody on deck. The party had set down to breakfast, and had just finished oyster

soup, when word came that the big *Arizona* was looming through the mist. They all deserted the table and as they crowded the rail, Oscar Wilde climbed upon a high piece of deck machinery and sat there holding his lilies and staring at the promenade deck of the liner whose details were so familiar to him. His eyes had no time to study the immigrants swarming at the *Arizona's* steerage rail. He was searching the groups of saloon passengers as they grew more distinct. He was hunting one face.

A brass band on the reception boat quit trying to warm its cold fingers by silently practicing on chilly instruments. It broke into "God Save the Queen," then passed into "Rule Britannia."

On board the liner, passengers were asking each other who that was in the cowboy hat, long hair, and lilies. One immigrant who asked this question was answered, "That's an American unspoiled by civilization."

Oscar's eyes, straining upward, suddenly settled upon one slender figure standing apart from the rest. It was SHE.

Lily of love, pure and inviolate,  
Tower of ivory, red rose of fire.

Mrs. Langtry, looking down, saw his lilies waving.

The reception committee went on board. Mrs. Langtry had gone back into her cabin, presumably to make herself ready for closer inspection by the press. It was six o'clock. She had arisen for the ceremony.

After a little, Mrs. Henry Labouchère appeared, stout, brunette, still pretty in her forties. Abbey introduced her. The reporters knew her as Mrs. Langtry's friend, theatrical adviser, and now chaperon for the American invasion.

Then out came "The Jersey Lily" herself, very demure, wearing no ornaments, very beautiful of face and figure, very "dainty of feet." Oscar had no chance to talk to her, nor to learn the details of how she had, shortly before sailing, sat as model for what he had heard was to be Burne-Jones's most aesthetic painting, "Fortune at the Wheel."

The reporters were all around her.

"What do you think of America?"

She laughed. "When the fog lifts, perhaps I can tell you."

What had she thought of the voyage?

It had disappointed her, she said, as if trying to duplicate Oscar's historic reaction to the Atlantic, that there had been wind, but not enough. "I wanted to see the ocean run mountains high. It ran only hills high."

She praised Mrs. Labouchère at her side.

When the newsmen asked about her finances, she said, "Oh, money's

pleasant to have, but if you have a great deal, there's no time to spend it all.”

As to her emotions over the approaching début, she said, “Oh, I'm not over my stage fright yet. I don't know how I shall act.” The profession had been very kind. Fanny Davenport had seen her off, giving her a large bouquet. Mrs. Langtry told how at two concerts, coming over, she had earned £20 for seamen's aid.

Then the reporters noted Charles Wyndham, the long-established star of London's stage, on board, arriving for a New York season. They went after him.

Oscar and Mrs. Langtry were alone. He gave her the lilies. The *New York Times* man, looking back at them, saw that after “a little talk” they parted, Lily returning to her stateroom.

Meanwhile the brass band wound up its welcoming duties by playing “The Girl I Left Behind Me” as reference to the fact that Langtry's boat had arrived ahead of Christine Nilsson's in a race much publicized.

## 2

Seventeen days later, “Park,” the Broadway correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, sent the word west that “ever since Mrs. Langtry arrived, Wilde has clung to her skirts.” And exactly one month after the meeting on the *Arizona*, another theatrical observer in New York wrote to the same newspaper, “As for love-smitten Oscar Wilde, he is head over heels in love with the much-discussed grass widow, Mrs. Langtry.”

In the sea of excitement which broke and beat around the actress, those twin reports kept bobbing—Lily Langtry is done with her husband—Oscar Wilde is mad about her.

To her Albemarle apartments came flowers by the bushel, autograph hunters by the hundred, beaux by the score. Oscar was only one of a hundred young men in attendance upon her. Letters asked her advice on beauty, on love, on husbands, on careers. When she entered Delmonico's, waiters dropped champagne bottles in their flurry. Sarony got the right to photograph her for a reported sum of \$5,000, and the little red fez danced wilder than ever before as he shot forty poses of her within an hour, and, a little later, fifty more as Rosalind. For she was to play *As You Like It* after her début in Tom Taylor's play, *An Unequal Match*.

Sarony was squandering negatives, but he said he had already one order from Paris for five hundred mounted photographs. He tried to be calm and judicious when newspapermen asked him about Langtry's

beauty: "She has a fine figure, good height, head well balanced, good features and a good expression—when she pleases."

One of Sarony's first proofs was shown by Mrs. Langtry to Wilde, and New York took it for granted that she was repeating his comment when she returned it to the photographer saying, "You have made me pretty. I am beautiful."

Sarony did not worry. He was getting \$5 apiece for the prints in the shops. "They sell wonderfully," one dealer told a *Tribune* man.

"And how do pictures of Cleveland and Folger sell?" asked the reporter, hearing outside the bands and parades at their daily task of whetting the voters' appetite for those rival candidates in New York's gubernatorial contest.

"Poorly!" snapped the shopman.

3

When people now noticed Oscar Wilde it was when he moved in Lily Langtry's shadow. A *New York Herald* man saw him sitting in the Albemarle, on the Sunday after Langtry's arrival, waiting for her to return with Abbey, Mrs. Labouchère, and other admirers from a steam yacht trip up the Hudson. When she came to her room, Oscar sat silently listening at one side while the reporter plied her with questions.

How had she liked the Hudson?

"I think it is simply lovely, grand, magnificent, or rather, let me use that expressive, American, somewhat paradoxical phrase, and say I was agreeably disappointed. I don't wonder that you call it 'The Rhine of America. . . .' But do you know, there is one thing that would prevent me from settling down somewhere upon the banks of the Hudson and becoming Americanized."

"And what is that?" the reporter demanded.

"Why, that horrid railroad train that runs all the way along the bank. It destroys very much of the beauty. Why do you allow it there?"

Her hearers remembered how Oscar had talked this way about trains, and their minds went to Wilde again when Langtry said, a moment later, "I suppose now I must see Niagara Falls, that great American attraction."

At this Oscar came out of silence, as if at a cue. "Oh, don't go to Niagara Falls," he said.

"Why not?" Lily asked, then before he could speak, rippled on, laughingly, "Oh, I remember now your experience in pulling up the

car window curtain and asking disappointedly, “Is that Niagara Falls?”, pulling down the curtain again and going to sleep.”

Oscar took the floor, saying, “They told me that so many millions of gallons of water tumbled over the fall in a minute. I could see no beauty in that. There was bulk there, but no beauty, except the beauty inherent in bulk itself. Niagara Falls seemed to me to be simply a vast unnecessary amount of water going the wrong way and then falling over unnecessary rocks.”

Weeks later, when Mrs. Langtry had persisted in visiting the celebrated cataract, Wilde observed, “She was photographed at Niagara, with the falls as an insignificant background.”

But in the Albemarle, on this Sunday afternoon, Oscar talked no more of the great American spectacle, nor of Mrs. Langtry, but of himself. He said he was thinking of going to Australia, and the reporter heard the actress ask him why.

“Well, do you know,” replied Wilde, “when I look at the map and see what an awfully ugly-looking country Australia is, I feel as if I want to go there to see if it cannot be changed into a more beautiful form.”

He threw back his long locks and laughed, and the New Helen laughed with him.

The reporter brought the conversation back to Mrs. Langtry’s début, which was scheduled for the following night. She was excited; hope burned high.

#### 4

Wilde had come to this meeting in the Albemarle from a gay night at the Lotus Club, where a dinner had been given for Bronson Howard, the playwright, and for Charles Wyndham, who had tried to rival Langtry’s publicity by having himself arrested so that he might learn what a prisoner would wear in serving a term of fourteen days. Wyndham’s play was named *Fourteen Days*.

A hundred and fifty glistening shirt fronts had gathered at the Lotus’s tables that were loaded with silver, glass, and smilax. Whitelaw Reid had been toastmaster.

The Lotus Club dinners were famous, although many of the newspapermen who had started the organization some years before had quit it for the less pretentious Press Club. Joseph Howard, Jr., said that “little by little the moneyed element of the city had crowded in, until the rooms were littered by the scions of wealth and trade, gamesters, drinkers, and smokers.” The Press Club, said he, “is more modest; it has brilliant banquets and receptions, but politicians and mere traders

are not welcome. The Lotus Club has an unenviable reputation of seeking to better itself by catering to notoriety. . . . There is a toadying element in it which finds no parallel in the Press Club.

"Oscar Wilde wouldn't be tolerated in the Press Club five minutes.

### THE JERSEY LILY'S LIKENESS.



UNEXPECTED CALLER:—"EXCUSE ME, MADAM, I AM NOT A BURGLAR; HERE'S MY CARD. HAVE ANY OF 'EM BEEN HERE BEFORE ME?"

### SARONY VICTORIOUS

"*Puck*," October 25, 1882, cartoons the craze for *Lily Langtry's* autographs and photographs, and shows Sarony's zeal triumphant.

The man is a sham. The only real thing about him is his hair. But in the Lotus Club he is a most welcome guest."

Wilde was welcome enough the night of the Howard-Wyndham banquet, even if among so many of his elders he sat below the salt. Reid called on him late in the evening, and although the club freed its speakers from the worry about being reported in print, echoes of Wilde's speech began to find their way, soon afterward, into the newspapers.

Joe Howard heard that Wilde, in arch ingratitude for all the favors which his agent and he, "a most persistent press-hounder," had asked of the newspapers, had seen fit "to make some extremely ill-natured

and absurd charges against the reporters of this city and country.”

And a Lotus Club member, signing himself “John Paul,” wrote to Toastmaster Reid’s *Tribune* that Wilde, at the banquet, had “dexterously mounted his moral step-ladder” and “let fall upon his critics most cunningly a finely sifted snow of satire.” One of his thrusts had been, “I am gratified to have provided a permanent employment to many an ink-stained life,” and his discourse had revealed, in John Paul’s opinion, the sad fact that “the playfulest shafts” of the American press during the past year “had stricken home” and left “wounds that still rankled.”

Wilde had also mentioned the Americans, who had disagreed with him on art—people “whose ideas of sculpture,” he said, “have been derived from the figures in front of the tobacconists’ shops.” Then he had told the diners some serious things about the drama as a school for developing artistic taste, and had concluded with, “Whatever is false will vanish; whatever is permanent will remain. I am patient, and I can wait.”

As he sat down to polite applause, John Paul thought him “like a great homely girl, one of those girls whose brother is sure to be good-looking, and who would be good-looking herself had she been born a boy.” John Paul did admit, however, that “beyond the femininely disposed hair and a certain redundancy of collar and cravat, there was nothing to distinguish him from the other eminent journalists about.

“Mr. Wilde is but a boy at best; not a bad one either, if I guess rightly, though he labors hard in his verse to make one believe to the contrary.” Paul wanted Oscar to pull himself together and do something. For instance, look at how modestly Herbert Spencer had come among Americans, quietly dressed, not spangled like Oscar, who had assumed a rôle that “was not a dignified part for an English gentleman to play.”

## 5

Within a few days Herbert Spencer himself would disclose how near to the young Aesthete’s were his own conclusions about America. Speaking on November 9th at a banquet given him by two hundred prominent men at Delmonico’s, he declared that in America “life is too joyless.”

Spencer was old, his voice was that of a philosopher, his manner was gentle, and his clothes conventional. America bowed to him. Yet whereas Wilde had told Americans they seemed always in a hurry to catch a train, Spencer told them that “work has become your passion. The hair of Americans turns gray ten years earlier than in England. Amer-

ican health is being undermined by stress of business and high-pressure life. The American almost ignores what good the passing day offers him. . . . Excessive devotion to work has the result that amusements are powerless to please when relaxation becomes imperative. . . . Nature quietly suppresses those who treat disrespectfully one of her highest products, 'the vile body.' . . . At Niagara the landlord told me that Americans come one day and leave the next. Old Froissart, who said of the English, 'They take their pleasures sadly after their fashion,' would say, 'Americans take their pleasures hurriedly after their fashion.' "

Spencer's listeners thought of Jay Gould, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, as the old Briton spoke of "a great leader among you who has deliberately endeavored to crush out everyone whose business competed with his own. . . . In America, business has practically been substituted for war as the purpose of existence."

6

That Wilde paid much heed to the minor repercussions of his press-baiting exploit at the Lotus Club was not thought likely by those who saw him drumming up trade for Mrs. Langtry's première.

There would be a great crowd at the Park Theater on Monday, October 30th, that much was certain. But Wilde was laboring to get the right people out, people who would see in her face what he had seen, the deathless beauty of Attic ideals. He had helped bring society folk to a reception given her—a reception at which a fashion writer had noted that her Worth gown of steel-colored satin, sprayed with roses—a *ciel d'Egypte*—was "a symphony, a nocturne, a discourse on earth, space, tuneful birds, rustling streams, the stars. . . ." He had noted, as had many, how Henry Abbey had spared no pains to make the costuming and the settings as sensational as they should be for so sensationally beautiful a star.

Wilde was excited and happy when W. H. Hurlbert, editor of Jay Gould's *World*, and Oscar's host upon occasion, asked him to serve as guest drama critic at the opening. He would have a chance to serve his New Helen with his pen as well as his talk.

The night of Sunday, October 29th, Mrs. Langtry rehearsed with the company until 2 A.M. Then, while she slept, carpenters toiled on the lavish settings. When she awakened, Mrs. Labouchère gave her final bits of advice.

Afternoon came, and David Belasco, the young manager of the Madison Square Theater, saw Mrs. Langtry taken to the Park to see



### THE LOTUS CLUB ARRIVES

*Aristocratic clubs greet the advent of the new Lotus Club with lofty sneers, and are righteously rebuked by the proletarian press:*

*Mr. Jeunesse Doré of the Union Club, loquitur: "See heah! What—ah—means this procession? 'Lotus'—'Lotus'—yaas—I comprehend. These awtists—these fellahs that wite and dwaw and puffawm at shows—puh-sons on salaries! Good gwacious! Awhuth ah vulgah! Cahn't keep dawgs. B'long to no high familith. Wuk for living! I think it 'orrid of them to come up wound heah." "Daily Graphic," New York, April 19, 1877.*

the workings of a "double stage," designed by Steele Mackaye. Belasco showed her how it worked, then about five o'clock went with her, Abbey, and Mrs. Labouchère back to the Albemarle, where they were talking when Pierre Lorillard came running into the room crying, "I'm afraid the Park Theater is on fire."

They all rushed to the windows and saw the roof of the theater ablaze, billows of smoke writhing in the orange flames which lit up the early winter darkness. Fire-bells were clanging. Belasco saw "Miss Lily clench her hands and wipe the tears from her eyes." Mrs. Langtry stood watching a signboard on the roof—the signboard with her name upon it. She said to herself, "If it stands, I'll succeed. If it burns, I'll succeed without it."

The sign was standing when the firemen had the last blaze quieted in the wrecked building. Belasco heard the actress say, "Well, we'll try again some other day."

That day was quick in coming, for Lester Wallack telegraphed Abbey a message which the latter interpreted as an offer to use Wallack's Theater for the Langtry opening. Abbey fell to work as the front pages of American newspapers told the story of the fire. Curiosity in Langtry doubled, and in the week that she awaited the building of new scenery, reporters telegraphed distant editors what Lily Langtry thought of the national elections which were to come the day after her débüt, what Lily Langtry thought of American dress, whether Lily Langtry had or had not a headache. In the craze for items about her, some reporters grew weary, if not bitter, one of them writing, "On her voyage to America, Mrs. Langtry won the steamer pool, £30. It is customary to give this to the ship's charities, but Lily Shylock Langtry quietly pocketed all but £1."

New York and the whole nation read of the splendor Abbey was creating for "the satin scene"—a \$5,000 setting with walls of maroon blue striped with twenty-four panels of black satin magnificently embroidered and each ending in "a heavy bullion tassel." The ceiling was to be of old gold satin, and from the center was suspended a magnificent chandelier, while in each corner of the walls, at the ceiling, swung a cornucopia of black satin. Portières were to fall from ebony and gilt poles.

Boxes were auctioned off, Charles Wyndham paying \$500 for one, and reminding people how, when Jenny Lind's tickets had been similarly sold in New York, many years before, an obscure hatter named Knox had bid \$390 and set the town saying, "Let's go see that hatter that paid \$390 to hear Jenny Lind," thus making the man's fortune.

New York seemed to forget tomorrow's election and tonight's *Lucia*

with Patti, as it crowded the lobby of Wallack's on the evening of November 6th. Mobs battered at rear entrances. Police struggled to keep the long lines flowing to the front doors. Boys darted in and out shouting, “Here y're. Get your pictures of Mrs. Langtry, the Jersey Lily, and Lillian Russell, the *New Jersey Lily*.”

Joseph Howard, Jr., saw Oscar Wilde come down to his critic's seat “looking like a red squash.”

## 7

The curtain went up. The public saw the fabulous Lily as Hester Grazebrook, and the word that was wired everywhere before midnight was “great personal success.” The critics, however, did not perform as had been hoped. Some of them damned her with faint praise and cool prophecies as to her ability to learn acting later on. The *Times* reviewer decided that she had not risen “above the crudities of the play” and that “her performance is a weak, vague, and unsatisfactory effort. It reveals no talent. It is cold, hard, and dull.” Most other critics admitted her beauty, but David Belasco knew she wanted an artistic triumph or nothing.

Oscar Wilde, as soon as he could get away from Langtry's dressing-room after the final curtain, rushed to the office of the *World*, sat down in his velvet coat and knee breeches and scribbled away at a furious pace.

A little later he carried his finished copy into the composing-room, looming among the astounded printers, grimy-faced “devils,” and leather-aproned make-up men, all of whom stared at the famous short pants. One of them sang out, “Growl, animals, growl!” and another noted how “the force cheerfully responded to the command.”

The copy-cutter read Wilde's opening words: “It is only in the best Greek gems, on the silver coins of Syracuse, or among the marble figures of the Parthenon frieze that one can find the ideal representation of the marvelous beauty of that face which laughed through the leaves last night as Hester Grazebrook. Pure Greek it is, with the grave, low forehead, the exquisitely arched brow, the noble chiseling of the mouth shaped as if it were the mouthpiece of an instrument of music.”

The copy-cutter read on: Here was beauty “based on absolute mathematical laws,” lips “able to become flowerlike in laughter or tremulous as a bird's wing, mold themselves at last into the strong and bitter molds of pain or scorn; then motion comes and the statue wakes into life.”



### "THE MODERN NERO'S HUMAN TORCHES"

A cartoon in the New York "Daily Graphic," December 28, 1882, showing the Standard Oil Company as Nero, drawn by the Rockefeller brothers—John D. on the left—while ruined competitors, bankers, and widows are burned to make a Roman holiday.

Less ecstatic was the critic about the lady's stage technique: “The charm to me of Hester Grazebrook's acting in the first scene of the play tonight was the mingling of classic grace with absolute reality, which is the secret of all beautiful art, of the plastic work of the Greeks, and of the pictures of Jean François Millet equally.”

He wrote of her personality, but always his pen swung back to the theme that haunted him—beauty, beauty, beauty: “This wonderful face, seen tonight for the first time in America, has filled and permeated with the pervading image of its type the whole of our modern art in England.” Langtry's costumes had lived up to her beauty, especially the one in the last act, “a symphony in silver-gray and pink, a pure melody of color which I feel sure Whistler would have called a scherzo.” The scenery had been painful; the cottage setting having “roses dreadfully out of tone and badly grouped”; the \$5,000 “satin scene,” what with its “heavy ebony doors entirely out of keeping with the satin panels, the silk hangings and festoons of black and yellow . . . quite ugly.” Nearly all modern scene painting was inferior to the painted hangings in Elizabethan times which were “a far more artistic, and so a far more rational, form of scenery.”

But, in the end, the beauty of Hester Grazebrook had “survived the crude roses and the mauve tablecloth triumphantly. That it is a beauty that will be appreciated to the full in America I do not doubt for a moment, for it is only countries which possess great beauty that can appreciate beauty at all. . . . The Philistine may of course object that to be absolutely perfect is impossible. Well, that is so; but then it is only the impossible things that are worth doing nowadays. . . .”

Not once did he say that his goddess was a great actress.

Wilde's brief invasion of the newspaperman's domain helped him not at all with that profession. Reporters and critics wrote that he had “made himself conspicuous at Langtry's début.” They sped the tale that he was making himself a goose about her.

“Park” saw Oscar on the night after the Langtry première, come to the theater where Salvini was playing *Othello* and cause what was regarded as a willful distraction. Near the middle of the first act, when the audience was hushed, “a stir began in the back of the house. The great Aesthete had entered, and made his way down the center aisle, accompanied by a couple of New York swells, to a seat near the front.” He was clad in full evening dress and white gloves, and drew the audience's attention from the stage to himself. The act over, he marched out slowly, and was “careful not to return till two or three minutes after the curtain had risen.” He repeated this performance through the many acts.

"People are beginning to ask why he hangs around any longer. The real reason appears to be that he has nothing special on his mind and that there are enough silly people afflicted with the English craze to flatter and amuse the fellow."

## 3

### "DO YOU LOVE MRS. LANGTRY?"

AS one who made it a rule never to notice politics, Oscar Wilde had sat watching Salvini play *Othello* on the evening of the Democratic tidal wave.

He might have noted, next morning, that his friend Robeson had been defeated for Congress over in New Jersey, and that the newly finished aesthetic mansion, one of the costliest in Washington, soon would be for sale. Some Philistine would be living under those gilded sunflowers which Oscar's visit had inspired the Robesons to put on top of their lightning rods. "Robeson has somehow failed to persuade the country that he is honest," said *The Nation*, by way of throwing a shovelful of dirt upon his political grave.

Wilde might also have seen, that morning after election, how the Puritans of Boston were fluttering like chickens that discover a fox in the coop. Ben Butler, that barbarian demagogue who defended and represented the masses, had been swept by the landslide into the governorship of Massachusetts. At last the immigrants, the newcomers, had shaken the hereditary rule of the old New England aristocracy.

Butler, as a Greenbacker, low-tariff man, and Anti-Monopolist, was, however, the only one among the Democratic victors over the country to imply any fundamental threat to the rule of the industrialists. Although the Democrats in many regions had received help from economically dissenting groups of farmers and laborers, the party itself contained too many merchant princes, particularly New York merchant princes, for it to propose anything radical against corporations.

Grover Cleveland, whom the Democratic victory was sweeping into the governor's chair at Albany, was as devoted as any Republican to "sound money." The monopoly-kings, sitting in their fastnessess in New York City, did not fear him. He would not countenance political

corruption, but he was sincerely devoted to the reign of business as a thing best for his country.

The party which Thomas Jefferson had founded to keep America's destiny in the hands of the individual farmer and small-town, small-unit manufacturer, had now no program for reviving those hopes.

The one American voice that spoke for the old handicraft ideal as something humanly superior to the piecework factory idea, the voice of Henry George, was heard in New York, in mid-November, saying things that should have excited Oscar Wilde. Where Wilde had come to America ten months before saying that “incessant, unattractive toil” was making workers “more and more dissatisfied with their dreary lives,” Henry George, arriving in New York from a European visit, was saying in a lecture:

“The invention of labor-saving machinery pushes down the scale of the laboring classes. The division of labor leaves the workman only familiar with the process of making a single part of the article produced. This means men must be gathered into vast workshops, the slaves of capital, helpless as infants.”

To the bulk of American voters, Henry George was a crank. They answered that vast workshops were the greatness of the country, and that the slaves of capital made very good wages indeed. And in late November they were pointing out how business, with the election out of the way, was forging ahead, demanding larger buildings for industry and commerce, and how bosses and employees alike were working harder, longer.

Even Robert G. Ingersoll, he whom Wilde had named the most intelligent man in America, was conceding the permanent victory of the corporation and the vast workshop. His clever brain was explaining that this need not be so bad:

“The time will come when a few large corporations will own all, and when that time comes, if the legislatures of the various cities wish it, the corporations will fix regular rates. . . . At present the large corporations are doing more, by buying up the smaller ones, to free this country from corporation tyranny than there could be any possibility of doing in any other way.”

No Englishman could see, in this election, the thing Gladstone had told Wilde: “The only reason for the passage of a great law in America is that it is for the good of the whole people.” One of the reasons for the Republican debacle had been its Congressional law awarding pork-barrel hand-outs to various localities under the guise of improvements—a measure recognized as harmful to the people as a whole. When President Arthur had vetoed this indefensible grab, he had been ac-

cused of splitting his party. There had been an apparent general rebuke to the Republicans for dallying so long with much-needed reform of civil service, but, said the Lotus Club cynics, this reproof had sprung from sentimentality, not from logic or patriotism. Guiteau, a product and victim of the old spoils system of politics, had dramatized the evil, and had forced the Civil Service issue into the campaign. He was now said not only to have shot Garfield, but the whole Republican Party, out of office.

## 2

With Ruskin's Socialism very quiescent within him, Oscar Wilde kept going to the theater, which was bright in the November evenings. His old enemies, the newspaper paragraphers, now paid him small heed; nor did he appear to care.

Late in the month, one of Whitelaw Reid's young men called upon Oscar in his furnished rooms on West One hundred and eleventh Street; rooms undistinguished as to decoration, and with only fragments of three Japanese parasols attached to a wall as if denoting “a presence not in harmony with the rest of the surroundings.”

Oscar was looking exhausted, and admitted that he was near nervous prostration in spite of all that four doctors could do. His heavy eyelids were lifted as the reporter asked him about *Vera*.

“Why do you ask?” Wilde asked.

“The public would like to know.”

“Oh!” The eyes closed again, and then the poet wearily said, “To persons of no reputation small paragraphs are doubtless an advantage, but, really, I do not care for them.”

“The production of your play might be a matter of a *big* paragraph,” persisted the *Tribune* man.

“I have made no arrangements as yet,” Oscar said, and went on, under fire, to suggest that he might be going to Australia when he could find a companion. As for Japan, it would keep.

The reporter retired with little to write. He had, however, hit upon the reason for Wilde's continuance in America. It was *Vera* that held him. That Nihilist lady must have her day. Wilde had sworn it. For a whole year he had spread her charms in the marketplace of the drama, with no bids. D'Oyly Carte, at the playwright's request, had made vain attempts to interest Kyrle Bellew, Forbes-Robertson and others. Mary Anderson, who might have played *Vera*, if she had once produced and finished with *The Duchess*, was no longer encouraging.

Edgar Saltus, the writer, was recalling how earlier in the year when

Wilde had been a great one in New York, with diners rising to see him as he entered Delmonico's, he had had a talk with the Britisher about *Vera*. Saltus remembered how in those days Wilde had told him a local manager had offered him an advance for the play—\$5,000, Saltus thought the figure had been—and how Wilde had called it “mere starvation wages.” Saltus continued, “Wilde went on to say that the manager had wanted him to make certain changes in it. He paused and added, ‘But who am I to tamper with a masterpiece?’”

Now in November, Wilde made no epigrams about any offer of any sum.

## 3

To add to the winter of Oscar's discontent, his adored New Helen became sooted with scandal.

It was all due to what the *New York Tribune* described as “her indiscretion in accepting attentions from certain wealthy and reckless young men who are conspicuous members of our ‘fast set.’” One of these alleged suitors, Robert Hutchings, former surrogate, was, in the *Tribune's* words, “a noble specimen of the Henry II style of beauty in the era when Henry, at the head of short-legged, curly-headed Norman knights, invaded and conquered Ireland.”

Another, and more triumphal member of the pack which elbowed the Oscar Wilde from Lily's door, was Freddie Gebhardt, the broker and horseman who was so often seen at Newport and Saratoga, and who now set New York buzzing. His social position, his good looks, his sleek black hair, his long black mustache, his broad shoulders, his income—estimated at anywhere from \$40,000 to \$80,000 a year—had for several years been a favorite topic in New York. And he became a figure of romance, indeed, as the word spread that he had run up a \$950 florist's bill for Lily Langtry, that he had taken her to the jeweler's again and again, and that he had given her the house in Twenty-third Street where she entertained her friends.

When Mrs. Langtry, on December 2nd, ended her New York engagement and went to Boston, Freddie went along. And when Mrs. Labouchère did not go along, New York pricked up its ears. A *Times* reporter, hanging around the Albemarle Hotel, saw Lily go through the lobby toward the hacks and wagons which were to take her trunks to the train. He heard that in her engagement, just closed, she had, with three plays, *An Unequal Match*, *As You Like It*, and *The Honeymoon*, put \$60,000 into Abbey's pockets. Then the reporter heard that Mrs. Labouchère and Lily had quarreled. He caught up with Mrs. Langtry and asked her. The beauty said there was no quarrel. Mrs. Labouchère

was simply going back to England instead of to Boston. The reporter saw the two women part "in apparently the most friendly manner."

Up in Boston, where she was to appear at the Globe Theater, Mrs. Langtry tore herself away from admirers and autograph-hunters long

## VANDERBILT'S LITTLE DISCIPLE.



FREDDY:—"I HAVE AN INCOME OF \$80,000 A YEAR! THE PUBLIC BE D---D!"

### MUD ON LANGTRY'S SKIRTS

"*Puck*," January 31, 1883, pictures Freddie Gebhardt riding on the train of Mrs. Langtry's gown, soiling it, and declaring his contempt of national opinion by repeating Vanderbilt's phrase.

enough to deny the story again, but this time she said Mrs. Labouchère had gone South on a visit. They would meet again in New York.

For a few days people read statements that the quarrel was an advertising hoax to aid Mrs. Langtry's forthcoming tour of the midlands, and that it was nothing but newspaper talk. Across the country was reprinted an item: "It is reported that the quarrel is due to the fact that neither lady has been received by 'society,' and each claims the only fault is the undesirable character of the other. Bernhardt, in her turn two years ago, was angered by her failure to be received by society

in this country, and now shuts the door of her hotel on all Americans, especially those of the weaker sex.”

Down in Washington the reporters found Mrs. Labouchère with Thomas P. Fowler, her husband's New York lawyer. Fowler spoke for his client: “It is nonsense to say, as has been generally rumored, that Mrs. Langtry has been handicapped socially by Mrs. Labouchère. The trouble is Gebhardt.”

There were items floating through the press of the whole nation about how a Miss Pattison, an actress in Mrs. Langtry's company, had been put to “watching the Jersey Lily” now that the chaperon was gone. Miss Pattison's friends denied this in print. Then came the rumor that Edward Langtry was sending over his own sister to fill Mrs. Labouchère's place.

Six days after Mrs. Langtry left New York, the *Tribune* was able to state emphatically that the break had come over Gebhardt, and Mrs. Labouchère came forth to verify this, saying, “I have had occasion to remonstrate with her in regard to a certain acquaintance which seems likely to interfere with her success. She did not take these remonstrances in good part, and insisted upon keeping up this acquaintance in Boston. I then told her I couldn't possibly consent to accompany her.”

Mrs. Labouchère's friend, Mrs. Blanche Roosevelt Machetta, who had sung the chief female rôle in the New York production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, spoke up: “On the ship Mrs. Labouchère spoke to her, and got the reply, ‘Don't interfere!’ . . . In New York, Mrs. Labouchère wanted her to have more dignity, was forced into a back seat; it hurt her. Mrs. Labouchère said, ‘You must choose between us,’ and the response was, ‘My choice is already made.’ ”

Soon Mrs. Labouchère embarked for England, her departure made additionally unpleasant by sensational publicity which arose when prying reporters discovered that she had been in Richmond, Virginia, filing suit for divorce from Richard Pigeon. Her lawyer explained that the suit did not imply any lack of legality as to her marriage to Labouchère; it was merely a form which she must follow so that Labouchère could transfer property from America to England without court complications.

Blithely the Jersey Lily swept from one reception to another in Boston, her hosts usually groups of society males. Freddie Gebhardt clung to her, and with his unwarranted self-confidence, continued to do his beloved much harm. Through the stage door he habitually went to the box Mrs. Langtry kept in the auditorium, and lolled there as if he owned the theater. Manager Stetson remonstrated and, as he told reporters, Freddie “got fresh.” Stetson finally ordered the ushers to

bar the dude unless he bought a ticket like anybody else. Freddie complained to Lily, and Lily to Stetson, whereupon, as the manager confessed to reporters, “I gave Mrs. Langtry a little advice about her conduct, but it was not well received. I believe she’s ‘cracked.’”

The actress, in her turn with the reporters, smiled her Mona Lisa smile and said, “Who is Mr. Gebhardt? A mere boy, only twenty-three. Is he so important that my recognition of him must set all tongues wagging?”

Lily and Freddie were, nevertheless, on the tongues of the nation, and in Chicago, whither she moved with her company, after picking up her husband’s spinster sister from the gangplank of the *Caledonia* later in the month, “a gilded youth” wagered \$1,000 that it would be he and not Freddie who would be riding with her three days after she reached the Windy City. At her Chicago hotel, local journalists were accused by New York newspapers of trying to steal her letters to Gebhardt.

And when she reached St. Louis, the *Globe-Democrat* shouted, “Freddie Is Here!” and printed a diagram of the rooms occupied by Mrs. Langtry and by Mr. Gebhardt, accompanying the chart with what the *New York Times* charged were “indecently suggestive” comments.

Into a room where Freddie, Lily, and Lily’s sister-in-law were eating quail and pigs’ feet burst a *Globe-Democrat* reporter, a fire-eating Louisianian, Major A. B. Cunningham, to ask impertinent questions.

“I think you reporters are very saucy!” Lily said.

The Major, clinging to his duty, asked Freddie, “Do you intend to make the entire grand circuit with Mrs. Langtry?” At this, as the Major reported the matter, “Lily dropped a whole quail on her lap and her knife and fork on the floor. Freddie fumbled with his coattail more nervously than ever, and his eye rolled like that of a man confronted with the crisis of his life.

“Yes—that is—I suppose so, I believe we will,” Freddie answered.

He gulped a glass of wine and said, “Go—go on and ask me anything you like.”

“Well,” resumed Major Cunningham, “do you really love Mrs. Langtry?”

Freddie replied that he hadn’t come to St. Louis to be insulted, and the Major had gone away to publish the conversation. To it the *New York Tribune* added, “No explanation which Gebhardt can give can make him appear otherwise than calf-like and contemptible.” He has “made it impossible for her friends to defend her conduct or to object to the worst interpretation her enemies may put upon it.”

The next day Freddie came up to Major Cunningham in the lobby

of the New Southern Hotel and wanted to fight. Cunningham had printed lies, he cried. The Major, who had earned his title in the Confederate cavalry during the recent war, kept his temper and replied he only fought with weapons. He thought further of this, as hours passed, and soon sent the *Globe-Democrat's* drama critic, John Jennings, to Gebhardt with a challenge to settle the matter with pistols in Indian Territory. Jennings found Freddie and Lily together, handed the folded summons to Gebhardt and waited. Lily asked to see the letter. Freddie refused. Lily had hysterics until the youth handed it over.

On reading it, Mrs. Langtry “regained her composure immediately” and declared that Mr. Gebhardt couldn’t fight a newspaperman because of the difference in their social status. Jennings replied that this was nonsense:

“Major Cunningham is a scion of one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in Louisiana.”

Then Lily begged Freddie for her sake to please, please ignore the summons. At last he assented.

Back in the *Globe-Democrat* office, Joe McCullagh, figuring that his efforts to put hell-raising into his staff had gone a little too far, summoned Major Cunningham and ordered him to drop the quarrel.

When Mrs. Langtry and her troupe moved to Memphis, Freddie was not along. He had announced he would go, but Manager Abbey, who had enough, abruptly sent him back to New York instead.

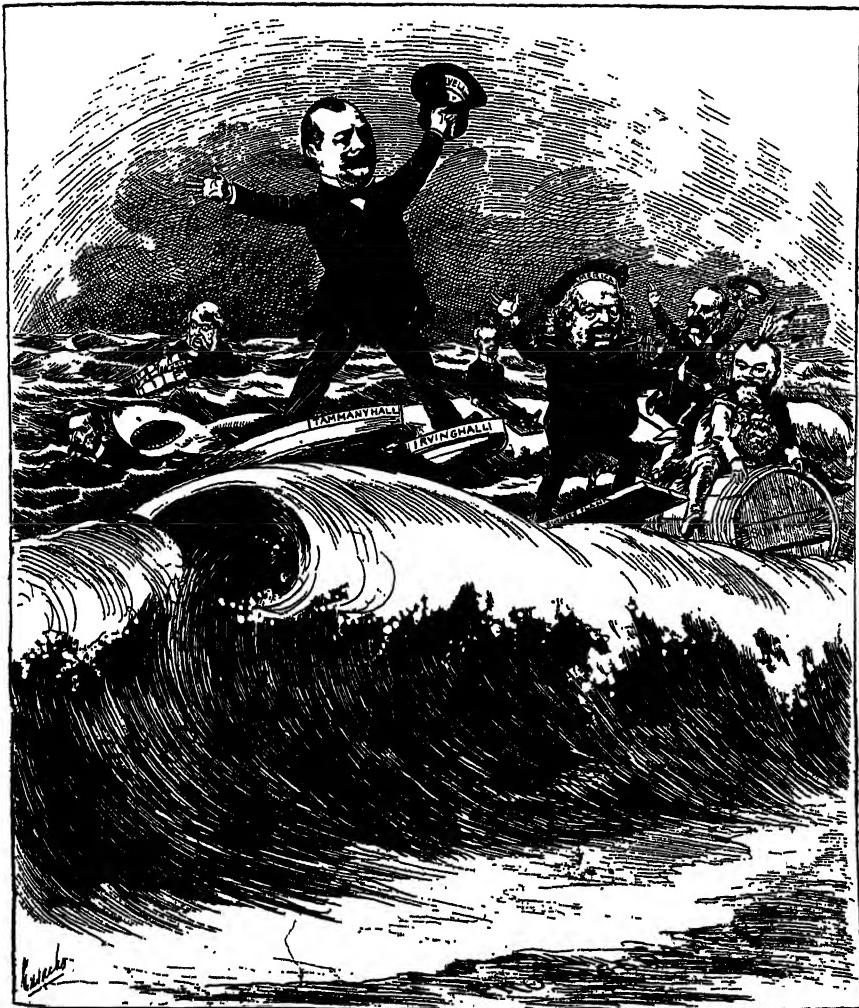
In New York Oscar Wilde sat helpless. He thought of the days before either his New Helen or he himself had come to America; the days in the studios, the afternoons when he had carried lilies to her.

Lily of Love, pure and inviolate,  
Tower of ivory, red rose of fire.

The one heartening thing in the whole affair was Joaquin Miller. That warm-blooded mountaineer had written to the *Boston Globe* when he had heard Mrs. Langtry was to play in that city, “Treat her well. She is altogether worthy of your best consideration and esteem: good, truthful, frank, sincere; pure as the snow and very brave. Treat her well.”

Miller was speaking for her as he had lately done for Oscar. Indeed, he had gone so far as to enclose for the *Globe* a poem he had once written to Mrs. Langtry when he had been a lionized American in London—a poem in which he had declared that if he were a bee—

Oh! I would hum God’s garden through  
For honey, till I came to you.



### "THE TIDAL WAVE"

*The Democratic Victory of 1882. Grover Cleveland becomes governor of New York; Ben Butler, in sailor cap, governor of Massachusetts; John Kelly, in the feathers of Tammany Hall, retains his power as "boss," while Oscar Wilde's friend, Robeson, is left out at sea, clinging to a tub and preparing, as a Republican defeated for Congress, to sink.*

*"Daily Graphic," November 13, 1882.*

After which he had proposed to “hive within her hair” more or less indefinitely.

The American poet denied the rather common story that it had been he who had first called her “The Jersey Lily.” He had addressed her as such when he had inscribed the bee poem to her in the English edition of one of his books. But he had not been the first to give her the title:

“I had heard Lord Houghton speak of her in most generous praise as ‘The Jersey Lily’ long before he presented her to me, and her worth and beauty induced the writing of the verses.”

There was no kindred step Wilde could take to defend her. He had trumpeted her advent louder than any, and she had let him down.

## 4

Oscar sat in furnished rooms he had taken in Greenwich Village watching the mail man bring all too few cards of invitation. Sam Ward got him guest privileges to the Manhattan Club, where he found a few members to listen to his talk, but behind his back there were again whispers, “What is he waiting for?” Now and then a paragraph revived the rumor of marriage; he was staying to woo an heiress. In England, the Boston legend was heard: Wilde was betrothed to the daughter of a noted literary lady of Beacon Street.

He was earning nothing. New York grew duller as an archaic Sunday-closing law was resurrected, darkening theaters and shops. Even newspaper sales were curtailed. A paragrapher declared that it was fitting that a cigar store should hang on its shuttered window the sign “Civil Liberty Departed This State, December, 1882.”

Wilde, with his indifference toward the clergy, had been paying no heed to the furious and detailed exposés preacher Talmage had lately been directing at the gambling dens of New York, particularly at the first-class ones, with their marble stairways, their liveried servants and rich banquet tables. Also with his mind on more orthodox forms of art, Oscar had forgotten about the case of Doc Baggs and Señor Otero, the lord of Las Vegas, which had filled the newspapers when he had been in Denver.

Unmindful of these things, Wilde was walking up Fifth Avenue on December 14th when, near Fifteenth Street, a thin-faced youth halted him with the words, “Excuse me, Mr. Wilde; you remember me, the son of Anthony J. Drexel?”

Affable Oscar shook the long thin hand. He had visited the office of Mr. Drexel, partner of Morgan, and, although he remembered nothing

about a son, he was unsuspicious. Young Drexel was hungry, so they lunched at Oscar's expense, and while they ate, the youth said he had just won a lottery prize and needed help to get his money. Would Mr. Wilde go with him?

Oscar, as innocent as Señor Otero, was glad to oblige, and soon they were in a house which, as Oscar later recalled, was on either Fifteenth or Seventeenth Street between Second and Third Avenues, a fine house where gentlemen were shaking dice for large stakes. “Young Drexel,” collecting his winnings, was presented with a “half-ticket” or bonus, which entitled him to play again at house expense. The youth used it in Wilde's name, won and proffered it to his friend. Then Oscar shook for himself—and won. He shook some more—and won. He shook still more—and lost. He shook to recover what he had lost—and was soon out \$60.

Searching his pockets, he found no such sum. Would they take a check? They would, and did; took not only that but soon enough a check for \$100 more—and still later another for \$1,000. Oscar paused, and Young Drexel sprang up with the cry, “You're being badly treated.” He left the house with Wilde, walked a way with him, then left, saying, “I'm going to see about it.” But Oscar was going to see about it himself, and took a cab to the Madison Square Bank upon which he had written the checks. Then, with payment stopped on the checks, he drove to the Thirtieth Street police station. Even if it bared his shame and opened him to new ridicule, he would carry through.

Into the office of Captain Alexander S. Williams, that noted thief-catcher, Oscar came, throwing himself upon a sofa and beginning, “Captain, I presume in your long and varied experience you have occasionally met with persons who make fools of themselves.”

“Yes,” grinned the captain.

“Well,” said Oscar, “I've just made a damned fool of myself,” and according to Captain Williams, “he said ‘damned’ with emphasis.”

Williams led him to the rogues' gallery, where, as the photographs of criminals were examined, Oscar picked out one, exclaiming, “Well, I declare! That's Drexel, without a doubt.”

Williams nodded sagely. The picture, he said, was not that of young Drexel; the man was “Hungry Joe” Sellick, one of the cleverest “bunco-steerers” in New York.

The police captain advised prosecution, but, as the *New York Times* eventually heard, “Wilde said he had been advertised enough, and didn't want the American public to know he had been taken in by a shark.”

Four days later Captain Williams received the poet's checks by mail.

He telegraphed Wilde at 48 West 11th Street, and Wilde came in and tore them up.

Usually complaints to the police were open to newspaper reporters, but this one, in spite of all its news value, was temporarily suppressed. Later, it was guessed that the officer had done it because he liked the young Britisher. Wilde had a way of charming persons he wanted to charm. A whole week had gone by before the newspapers got wind of the affair. To Oscar, as he sat in Delmonico's on Christmas Eve, there came a reporter, saying that he knew the story and wanted confirmation.

Wilde blew smoke rings at the ceiling and said, in his softest voice, “I should object to losing \$1,000, but I should not object to have it known if I had done so.”

Baffled, the reporter retired. He would hold the story until Wilde had sailed for England—an event which gossip said was soon to come.

## 5

Each day Wilde watched the newspapers, fearful of finding his gambling mishap spread forth as a new object of American mirth.

He scanned the pages. The month had been a lively one:

December 8, Washington: Oliver Wendell Holmes, forty-one-year-old son of Dr. Holmes, has been appointed Associate Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court.

December 10, New York: The committee on baseball rules has adopted a new one. Next season a foul hit will have to be caught on the fly instead of on the bounce in order to put a batsman out.

December 14, New York: The U. S. Senate committee investigating panics hears evidence which agrees the cause to be this: “When men are scared they sell.” William K. Vanderbilt testifies, “I'm against ‘corners.’ They injure my trade. I'm a first-rate buyer, but an awful poor seller. I never sold a stock short in my life. . . . I'm very prejudiced against a bear of any kind.” A clergyman, following Vanderbilt on the stand, quotes the Bible against corners in grain until faced with the fact that the market device had been invented by Moses and Aaron.

December 17, St. Louis: An actress has quit *The Passion's Slave* company because Mr. Stevens, playing opposite her, insisted upon giving her what in the profession is known as “the Henry V kiss.” She describes it. “The man approaches from behind, takes the lady's face with both hands under the chin, turns her mouth toward him and kisses it over her shoulder.” The actress adds, “I'm not a prude, but I do not think that anyone but a husband, an engaged lover, or a

guardian should kiss in the way Mr. Stevens kissed me in the play.” It is expected “the Henry V kiss” will be abolished.

December 18, Boston: Henry James, Sr., aged 71, died at home of his son, Professor William James of Harvard. His other son, Henry James, Jr., had returned some weeks ago, from England, to the bedside.

December 20, New York: A month from today the Second Ensilage Congress is to meet here. The new president is expected to be Frank Morris of Buffalo, the first man to build a silo in America.

December 25, Chicago: A reign of terror on the highways, with robberies of almost hourly occurrence after nightfall. Mayor Harrison advises citizens to carry dirks in their boots and stout sticks in their hands. Chicago is the worst-governed city in America.

December 26, Cincinnati: The telephone company removed the telephone of A. H. Pugh because he said into it, “If you can’t get the party I want you to, you may shut up your damn telephone.” He sued to get the instrument restored. Courts today decided in favor of the company. “Damn” may not henceforth be said over the wire.

December 27, Chicago: Advance sale for Mrs. Langtry’s engagement opened this morning and by four o’clock, six thousand one hundred seats sold.

December 27, the *New York Times*: Oscar’s mamma, “Speranza,” has furnished the would-be social folk a textbook in an article for a London weekly. She advises women to beware, in their new freedom of speech, of talking too much. Lady Byron, she says, interrupted her husband while he was at immortal work, with “Am I in your way, Byron?” “Damnably!” he replied. “Speranza” adds, “And Lady Byron deserved it. She ought to have known intuitively she *was* in the way.” As Lord Lytton said, “Nothing ages like domestic happiness.”

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### HEALTH PRESERVER

*Type of American dress reform somewhat divergent from that advocated by Wilde. An advertisement that met the traveler's eye many times during the autumn of 1882. "New York Times," October 15, 1882.*

While he watched the papers, Wilde kept working, working on a career for *Vera*.

Toward the last of December he began to get results from conferences with the actress, Marie Prescott—conferences engineered by Steele Mackaye. On the road where she was acting in Salvini's company, Miss Prescott had found time to read and to like the play.

When it came to negotiations, however, her husband and manager, William Perzel, would not sign for the advance and percentage demanded by Wilde. The playwright wrote the actress how advantageous acceptance would be to her career; “my name signed to a play will excite some interest in London and America.”

No contract was signed, but persons who knew something of the negotiations surmised that Wilde won Miss Prescott's oral assurance that all would be well, she would play it, he needn't stay in America any longer on that account. And on December 20th, Joe Howard was saying in his New York letter, “Langtry is utterly played out in this part of the land and Oscar Wilde goes home next week. Good riddance!”

On the eve of his sailing, Wilde “confessed,” said the *New York Tribune*, “that his mission to our barbaric shores had been substantially a failure.”

His friends wondered if he had really said that. Had he admitted failure after having been able to travel some fifteen thousand miles, lecturing in more than sixty cities to audiences as often large as small, and receiving the hospitality of notables of the business, political, social, and religious worlds?

Had the tour been a failure financially, when his letters to Colonel Morse showed he had sent home sums to his mother? “Very considerable amounts were mailed to England,” the Colonel later declared, “and at the end a substantial and ample compensation was paid him. . . . His honorarium for the year spent in America was what was then a large sum for any foreign lecturer.”

Frank Harris learned that the gross receipts of the tour had been some £4,000, with Wilde receiving £1,200, which left him “a few hundreds above his expenses.” Harris thought that it was only “his optimism that made him regard this as a triumph.” Although Harris's figures covered only the first six months of Wilde's stay in America, it

was apparent that the lecturer's expenses had swelled while his income had shrunk during the last half of the year.

In London the *Pall Mall Gazette*, discussing the “admitted failure” of Oscar's visit, quoted Christine Nilsson as having said that Wilde's costume in America was one that he had not worn in England, and which “would not be tolerated” at home.

The *St. James Gazette* was telling Britishers, “Wilde has been laughed out of the United States,” and the *London Daily News* was declaring, “Wilde is coming home a sadder if not a wiser man, leaving Americans a merrier but not less wise people.” They had “laughed at him and when they were tired of laughing forgot him.” Perhaps, observed the editor, “Mr. Oscar Wilde may have more sympathy with the Atlantic Ocean, as itself a gigantic failure. He may have a certain indulgence for it as a melancholy and monotonous impostor. The Atlantic Ocean, Niagara Falls and the American people—they are all vast delusions each as indifferent as the others to the majestic personality of Mr. Oscar Wilde.”

As an apostle of the aesthetic movement, Wilde might well have confessed that his tour had been “substantially a failure.” If he had come with any impelling vision of founding, by a year of lectures, a cult of the beautiful among American workers, he must have known, within a few weeks after arriving, that he had attempted the impossible. As early as his Brooklyn address he had known that his monotonous delivery was crippling the message which he had hoped to plant in his listeners. It had been as a freak, a long-haired man in short pants, that he had drawn the crowds.

While here and there he had encouraged decorative art schools and groups, and while he had said some telling things about architecture and house furnishings, he knew that of the thousands who had heard him there were mere hundreds, perhaps dozens, who had taken a single word to heart.

He had not changed America—but America had changed him.

Mrs. Churchill, out in the mountains, had not made good her boast to take the nonsense out of him, yet, according to his friend, Robert Sherard, “America had taken the nonsense out of him.” Sherard said that Oscar's tour had brought him “into contact with the most energetic of men, roused his latent energy, sharpened and stimulated him to a degree that made him almost unrecognizable. . . . The dealings he had had with men, the struggles both social and commercial in which he had, in the main, triumphed, had given him experience which years of life in London might never have afforded. He had had a sound commercial training.” On the homeward voyage he would, said Sherard,

“drop his masquerade and unworthy posturings overboard, lose his affectations of manner and speech.” As he left America, he was ready to repudiate “the Oscar Wilde of the aesthetic movement,” and give up his knee breeches.

Mrs. Frank Leslie saw him “return to England as the conventional nineteenth century gentleman, quiet in dress and reserved in manner.”

Oscar Wilde said good-by. He was going home and cut his hair.

## 4

### “NO WAVE OF HIS CHISELED HAND”

WHATEVER of a showman’s trappings Oscar Wilde might be prepared to drop overboard on the voyage was not visible to a reporter who, on the morning of December 27th, saw the poet tell America farewell.

The steamer *Bothnia* stood at the Cunard dock quivering from the strokes of her impatient engines, and to it, a little before ten o’clock, came a carriage driven by a coachman in dark green livery with silver buttons. Out stepped Oscar Wilde and two well-dressed friends—one of them the owner of the carriage, said the reporter, though he didn’t bother to inquire.

Although his wide Western hat was pulled well down, Oscar’s face was still noted by the onlookers as “clean-shaven, with remarkably long eyelashes, which appeared as though they had been freshly penciled.” He “mounted the gangplank with the languid grace of a Bunthorne.”

The longshoremen stared at him, but he paid no heed. He went straight to his cabin, which held flowers, “conspicuous among them a large sunflower.” A Japanese umbrella or two had been hung on the walls.

He returned to the deck and, as the ship moved off with her tugs, he waved farewell to his two loyal friends.

Back on the mainland, squibs of printer’s ink, “comic, without being amusing,” fired a parting salute:

“Good-by, Oscar; we shan’t miss you.”

“We know a charlatan when we see one.”

“Oscar Wilde has abandoned us without a line of farewell, slipped

away without giving us a last goodly glance, left without a wave of his chiseled hand or a friendly nod of his classic head."

"This is the end of the aesthetic movement."

In New York hotels where he had come as a lion, head waiters were now taking reservations for New Year's Eve, and wine stewards were frantically ordering more cases. Hostesses were preparing lists of people who would toast each other among the sparkling glaciers of cut-glass at Delmonico's. Mrs. Leo Hunter was asking who was new from the other side, what foreign notables would be here. The sexton of Trinity Church was rehearsing the chimes which on the holiday midnight would ring out over the heads of trumpeting throngs.

Through portholes, as the *Bothnia* glided homeward, Oscar Wilde saw the mists of the Atlantic. The Atlantic? When he reached Liverpool the reporters would be sure to ask him about the ocean which he had insulted, a year before. What would he say now? What should he say?

There was but one thing to do; stand to his guns. When they asked him, he would reply, "I was disappointed with it. The Atlantic is greatly misunderstood."

Now as the white mists stole past the portholes of his cabin, Oscar Wilde thought of all he had seen from car windows in the past twelve months—all the American faces, all the American factories belching smoke.

The American?

What would describe him? What would hit him off? Ah—

"For him Art has no marvel, and Beauty no meaning, and the Past no message."



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*Chapter 1*

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## INDEX

- Abbey, Henry E., 47, 416, 423, 425, 436  
Abbott, Emma, 195, 201  
Abbott, Lyman, 222  
Adair, Iowa, scene of train hold-up by  
Jesse James, 264  
Aesthetica, 17  
*Alabama*, Confederate cruiser, 151  
Alcott, Bronson, 105, 115  
Alcott, Louisa May, 44, 115  
Alden, Henry M., 45  
Aldrich, Thomas Bailey, 107, 115, 395  
Allen, Alsatia, 369, 389  
Alexander, John W., 343  
Ames, Oakes, 238  
Ames, Oliver, 238  
*An Unequal Match*, 418  
Anderson, Lars, 201  
Anderson, Mary, 47, 409-410, 431  
Anderson, Robert, 201  
Anson, Adrian C., "Pop," 411  
Anthony, Susan B., 109-110, 132, 134, 378  
*Arizona*, Steamship, 3, 28, 31-32, 34-35,  
417  
Arkell, W. J., 385-387  
Arkins, Colonel, Denver Editor, 302  
*Arrah-na-Pogue*, 115  
*Art Decoration Applied to Furniture*, 146  
*Art Journal, The*, 147  
Arthur, Chester A., 90, 250, 297, 430  
Arthur, William, 151  
Astor, Emily, 51-52  
Astor, John Jacob, 51, 413  
Astor, William B., 51  
*Ave Imperatrix*, 244  
  
Baggs, "Doc," 301-302  
Bagley, Company, Eric, 39  
Bancroft, George, 51  
Bands of Hope, 401  
Barlow, S. L. M., 63  
Barnard, Fred A. P., President of Co-  
lumbia University, 60  
Barnum, P. T., 184, 186-187, 222, 227, 344  
Barrett, Lawrence, 39  
Barrymore, Maurice, 170  
"Battle Hymn of the Republic, The," 52  
*Bazar Book of Decorum, The*, 143  
Beauregard, Pierre Gustave Toutant, 362-  
363  
Beecher, Henry Ward, 130-135, 218, 222,  
344, 377, 380  
Beers, Mrs. Bernard, 24  
Belasco, David, 423-424  
Bellew, Kyrie, 431  
  
Bennett, James Gordon, 380, 382  
Bergh, Henry, 412-415  
Berkey, Mrs. T. H., 253  
Bernhardt, Sarah, 13, 35, 38, 39, 41, 45,  
171, 238, 416 433-434  
Bigelow, John, 47  
Bigelow, Mrs. John, 60, 383  
Billings, Josh, 107, 222  
Blackwell, Henry B., 109  
Blaine, James G., 90, 104, 206; on Whit-  
tier as politician, 104  
Bodley, J. E. C., 12  
Bogue, David, 21  
Bohemian Club, San Francisco, 255  
Bonner, Robert, 355  
Bonney, William H., "Billy the Kid,"  
268  
Booth, Edwin, 39, 155  
*Bothnia*, Steamship, 444, 445  
Boucault, Dion, 115, 117  
Bowen, Tom, 293, 297, 300  
Braggiotti, Madame, 118  
Broome, Carrie, 342  
Broome, Professor Isaac, 341, 343  
Buchanan, James, 197  
Buchanan, Robert, 18  
Buell, August C., 98  
Bull, H. C., 181  
Bunner, H. C., 53  
Bunthorne, Reginald, character in *Pa-*  
*tience*, 3, 6-7, 21, 28-29, 54, 57  
Buntline, Ned (E. Z. C. Judson), 37  
Burdette, Robert, 222, 377  
Burnand, F. C., editor of *Punch*, 6  
Burne-Jones, Sir Edward, 417  
Burney, photographer, 39  
Burnett, Mrs. S. N. (Frances Hodgson  
Burnett), 89-90  
Burnett, Vivian, 90  
Burnham, Daniel H., 176  
Burroughs, John, 47-48  
Bush, Bill, 300-301, 323  
Butler, General Benjamin Franklin, 222,  
392, 407, 429  
Byron, Lady, 441  
Byron, Lord, 441  
  
Cable, George W., 362-363  
Cameron, Edgar S., 344  
Campanini, Cleofonte, 38  
Cannon, George Q., 273  
Carleton, Will, 107  
Carlotta, Mme., 388  
Carnegie, Andrew, 43, 152, 274

- Carroll, Mr. and Mrs. Charles, 80-81, 102  
 Carte, Richard D'Oyly, 4-8, 22-25, 45,  
 60-61, 79, 102, 226, 344, 431  
 Carter, Mrs. Leslie, 174  
 Castle Garden, New York, 34-35, 347  
 Cavendish, Lord Frederick, 344  
 Cellier, Francois, 7  
 Cellini, Benvenuto, Wilde's jest concerning him, 314  
 Chadwick, Dr. James Read, 116, 118  
 Chaplin, Mrs. J. D., 403  
 Chanler, Winthrop, 125  
 Channing, William Ellery, 104, 131  
 "Charmides," 119-120, 244  
 Chase, William N., 343  
 Chesbrough, E. S., 177  
 Chicago Water Tower, 175-179  
 Chickering Hall, New York, 54, 57  
 Childs, George W., 73, 77  
 Chinese Exclusion Act and agitation, 249-  
 250, 296  
 Choate, Rufus, 279  
 Church, Ella Rodman, 147-148  
 Churchill, Inc., 144  
 Churchill, Lord Randolph, 152  
 Churchill, Mrs., Colorado editress, 286,  
 319-320  
 Clarke, James Freeman, Rev., 52, 118  
 Clayton, Alvah Patee, 333-334  
 Cleveland, Grover, 160, 429  
 Clifford, Minnie, 285-287, 304  
 Cockerill, John A., Colonel, 98  
 Cody, William F. (Buffalo Bill), 37, 289  
 Coghlan, Rose, 35  
 Colman, Julia, 110, 401  
*Colonel, The*, Burnand's Play, 6, 39  
 Cold Water Army, 401  
 Comley-Barton Opera Troupe, 241  
 Comstock, Anthony, 236  
 Conboy, Jack, 163  
 Conkling, Roscoe, 69  
 Connors, James, 286, 324  
 Cooper, C. K., Colonel, 292  
 Cooper, Mrs. Sarah B., 213  
 Coppee, Henry, Professor, 71  
 Corsets, 138, 150, 153, 250-261  
 Cotton, Will J., 182, 183  
 Craig, Peter, 157  
 Crawford, Francis Marion, 51, 118  
 Crittenden, Thomas T., Governor of Missouri, 268, 333, 377  
 Crockett, John S., 392  
 Croly, Mrs. D. G. (Jennie June), 44-45  
 Crombie, Kate, 128  
 Crouse, C. E., 386  
 Cunningham, Major A. B., 435-436  
 Curtis, George William, 222  
 Curtis, William Elery, 170  
 Custer, General George A., 233, 245  
 Darwin, Charles, 340  
 Davenport, Fanny, 418  
 Davis, Carlyle Channing, 292, 322  
 Davis, Jefferson, 211, 366-368, 372-373  
 Davis, L. Clarke, 73  
 Davis, Rebecca Harding, 73  
 Davis, Richard Harding, 73  
 Davis, Robert Stewart, 71  
 "Decorative Arts," lecture, 177  
 Delmonico's Restaurant, 418, 432, 440  
 Dennis, Charles, 195-197  
 Dexter, Mrs. Wirt, 217  
 Dickens, Charles, 39, 89, 103, 151  
 Dickinson, Anna, 222, 378  
 Dixie, Henry E., 290  
*Doctor Claudius*, novel by F. Marion Crawford, 51  
 Donohue, John, 179-180  
 Doremus, Professor Charles A., 185, 187  
 Dougherty, Daniel, 71-72  
 Dousman, Hercules L., 210  
 Dow, Neal, 237, 397  
 Drake, John B., 166-167  
 Dresser, Clarence, 406  
 Drew, John, 36  
 Drexel, Anthony J., 438  
*Duchess of Padua, The*, 383, 410, 431  
 Du Maurier, George, 4-5, 9, 11, 14, 18-21,  
 23, 28-31, 46, 60  
 Duveneck, Frank, 342  
 Dwight, James, 380  
 Eastlake, C. L., 146  
 Eastman, George, 68  
 Eddy, Mrs. Mary Baker, 112-113  
 Edison Company, 166  
 Edison, Thomas A., 41, 167, 259-260, 377  
 Edwards, Major John M., 268  
 Eggleston, Edward, 107, 193-195  
 Elgee, Dr. J. K., 362  
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 65, 76, 104, 276,  
 340, 378  
 Emmet, Robert, 201, 215  
 "English Renaissance, The," given for  
 first time, 54  
 English, William, 196  
*Ethel's Choice*, 145  
 Farquhar, Mr., 392-393  
*Farm Ballads*, by Will Carleton, 107  
 Field, Eugene, 285-287, 289-292, 308, 320-  
 322, 325  
 Field, Kate, 44, 48, 71  
 Field, Marshall, 166, 174  
 Fisk, Harrison Grey, 53-54  
 Forbes, Archibald, 7, 79-82, 138, 201  
 Forbes-Robertson, Sir Johnston, 13, 15,  
 16  
 Ford, Robert, slayer of Jesse James, 267-  
 268, 332-334, 412  
 Ford, Charles, brother of Robert Ford,  
 267-268  
 Fortesque, Mrs. Marion, 158  
 Foster, Captain, 256-257  
 Fourteenth Amendment to U. S. Constitution, 69

- Fowler, Thomas P., 25, 434  
 Francis, David, 209  
 Frick, Henry C., 43  
 Fry, Ned, 256-257
- Gardner, Mrs. Jack, 118  
 Garfield, James A., 85, 95-96  
 Garibaldi, General, 378  
 Garrett, Sheriff Pat, 268  
 Garrison, William Lloyd, 104, 109-110  
 Gaston, George, friend of Eugene Field, 290-291  
 George, David E., 268  
 George, Henry, 430  
 Gebhardt, Freddie, 384, 432-436  
*Germ, The*, English periodical, 17  
 Gilbert, William, 4, 7, 25, 58-59  
 Gilder, Richard Watson, 45  
 Gladstone, William Ewart, 12, 41, 49  
 Gloyd, Dr. Charles, 365  
*Godey's Lady's Book*, 138, 141-147, 150-152, 381  
 Gompers, Samuel, 70  
 Goodyear Rubber Curler Co., 199  
 Goodwin, Nat, 131  
 Gough, John B., 218, 222, 398-400  
 Gould, Jay, 40-43, 237, 360  
 Grace, Mayor William R., 47  
*Grandissimes, The*, by George W. Cable, 362  
 Grand Union Hotel, Saratoga, 384, 387  
 Grant, Ulysses S., 152, 210, 391  
 Gray, Frank, 355, 358, 371  
 Greeley, Horace, 222  
 Greenaway, Kate, "hats," 149  
 Greenbackers, The, 196-197  
 Griffin, Hamilton, 410  
 Griggsville, Kansas, Wilde's jest concerning it, 338  
 Gross, H. L., 384  
 Gross, Professor S. H., 73  
 Grossmith, George, Jr., 7  
 Grymes, John R., 52  
 Guiteau, Charles, 95-99, 103, 206, 340, 369-370, 379, 392  
 Guiteau, John W., 340  
 Gunsaulus, Rev. Frank W., 343  
 Guthertz, Professor Carl, 210
- Hale, Edward Everett, 113, 222  
 Hamilton, Walter, 7  
*Hanging of the Crane, The*, 355  
 Harriman, Edward H., 42  
 Harrington, Mrs. Harvey, 376  
 Harris, Frank, 10, 24, 28, 442  
 Harrison, Mayor Carter H., 169, 170, 441  
 Hart, Jerome A., 255  
 Harte, Bret, 249, 378  
 Hartley, Florence, 139-144  
 Hartranft, John F., Governor of Pennsylvania, 71  
 Harvard Students, 122-129  
 Haverly, J. H., 217
- Hawthorne, Julian, 377  
 Hay, John, 107, 378  
 Hay, Rev. Timothy, 273  
 Hayes, Augustus, Jr., 47, 54  
 Hayes, Rutherford B., 386  
 Hearst, George, 250  
 "Henry V Kiss," 440-441  
 Henson, Rev. Poindexter S., 218  
 Hicks, Rev. A. W., 370  
 Higginston, Thomas Wentworth, 106, 109, 118-121, 160, 400  
*Hints on Household Taste*, 146  
 Hoar, Senator George F., 250  
*Hobbies*, 131  
 Hodson, Henrietta, see Mrs. Henry Labouchère  
 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 104, 115, 116  
 Holmes, Judge Oliver Wendell, 440  
*Hoosier Schoolmaster, The*, 194  
 "House Beautiful," lecture, 353, 367  
 Howard, Bronson, 420  
 Howard, Joseph, Jr., 407, 420-421, 426  
 Howe, Julia Ward, 49, 51-53, 106, 109, 118-121, 125, 354, 382-383  
 Howells, William Dean, 107, 189, 205, 222, 355  
 Howson, John, 241  
 Hunt, Helen, 45  
 Hunt, Holman, 17  
 Huntington, Collis, 42  
 Hurlbert, William Henry, 60, 423  
 Hutchings, Robert, 432
- Indiana University, 195  
 Ingersoll, Robert G., 90-94, 131, 209, 213, 219-222, 340, 430  
 Inness, George, 344  
 "Interior and Exterior Decoration of Houses" lecture, 183, 218  
*Iolanthe*, 7  
 Ireland, Archbishop, 224  
*Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, Wilde's lecture, 255, 269-270  
 Irving, Henry, 15, 378
- James, Frank, 234, 264-266, 339, 377, 412  
 James, Henry, 441  
 James, Henry, Jr., 107, 189, 355, 441  
 James, Jesse, 234, 263-269, 333-334, 339-340, 347, 378, 392  
 James, William, 441  
 Jefferson, Joseph, 39  
 Jennings, John, 436  
 Jerome, Jennie, 152  
 Jewett, Mrs. John N., 217  
 Jewish immigration, 347  
 "John," Wilde's valet, 153, 204, 211  
 Johnson, Dr. Herrick, 170  
 Jumbo, Barnum's elephant, 184, 186-187, 237, 385
- Kearney, Dennis, 249  
 Keats, George, 193

- Keats, John, 18, 58, 193  
 Keene, James R., 88  
 Keifer, Joseph, 90  
 Kelley, Alfred, 343  
 Kelley, Mrs. Alfred, 343  
 Kellogg, Clara Louise, 388  
 Kelly, J. E., 78, 344  
 Kelly, King, 411  
 Kemble, Fanny, 39, 106  
 Kilpatrick, Hugh Judson, 222  
 Kiralfy, Imre, 171  
*Kit, The Arkansas Traveler*, 36  
 Kitson, A., 212  
 Knox, the hatter, 425  
 Knights of Labor, 169  
 Labouchère, Henry, 25-26, 209  
 Labouchère, Mrs. Henry, 25-26, 417-418,  
     423, 425, 432-434  
*Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of  
Politeness*, 139  
 "La Mer," poem by Wilde, 72  
 Langtry, Edward, 12-13  
 Langtry, Mrs. Lily, 4, 12-16, 24-28, 65,  
     217, 237, 289, 392-393, 415-438, 441  
 Lawson, Victor F., 165  
 "Le Jardin," poem by Wilde, 72  
 League of American Wheelmen, 377  
 Leet, Colonel John E., 293  
 Leiter, Levi C., 174  
 Leland, Charles, 346, 349  
 Lend-A-Hand Clubs, 113  
 Lenoir, Helen, 7, 22, 79  
 Le Sage, 237  
 Leslie, Mrs. Frank, 24, 55, 444  
 Lewis, George, 80  
 "Liberta Sacra Fames," 244  
*Life on the Border*, 37  
 Lillie, Mrs. John, 60  
 Lincoln, Mrs. Abraham, 379  
 Lincoln, Robert, 89, 392  
 Lippincott, J. B., 71  
 "Little Peach, The," Eugene Field's  
     poem, 290  
 Livermore, Mary A., 109  
 Locke, Charles E., 226, 252, 256, 275,  
     304, 320, 354  
 Locke, David R., 222  
 Logan, Mrs. John A., 174  
 Lomery, Chief of Police James M., 285-  
     287  
 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, 50, 76,  
     106, 115-116, 240, 354-355, 362  
 Lorillard, Pierre, 425  
 Lotus Club, 420-422, 423-424  
 Lovejoy, Rose, 285  
 Lowell, James Russell, 115  
*Lyrical Recreations*, Sam Ward's volume  
     of poems, 50  
 Machetta, Blanche Roosevelt, 434  
 Mack, Mr. and Mrs. John, 54, 59-60  
 Mackaye, Steele, 47, 388-389, 409-410, 442  
 Mackenzie, Ross, 352  
 MacVeagh, Franklin, 174, 176  
 Maddern, Minnie, 379  
 "Mary, the Maid of the Inn," 221  
 Mallock, W. H., 103  
*Man, Woman and Child*, Ingersoll's lec-  
     ture on, 93  
 Mansfield, Richard, 39  
 Markham, Pauline, 39  
 Marsh, Rev. T. F., 212  
 Marshall, W. G., 180, 232, 257  
 Marston, Attorney-General Massachu-  
     setts, 347  
 Massachusetts Suffrage Association, 109  
 Masset, Stephen, 50  
 Maturin, Father, 78  
 Maud, S., racehorse, 188, 384  
 Maudle, character in *Punch*, 5, 20-23, 28-  
     29, 46  
 McAllister, Ward, 45  
 McClellan, George B., 47  
 McCormick, Cyrus, 170  
 McCourt, Baby Doe, 298  
 McCrae, David, 259  
 McCreary, Charles, 253  
 McCullagh, Joseph, 203, 436  
 McCulloch, Hugh, 84  
 McDonald, Mike, 170, 173  
 McGuffey's Readers, 220-221  
 McLaughlin, M. Louise, 188, 200  
 McLean, John, 189, 190  
 McVicker, James H., 171  
 Meagher, Thomas Francis, 216  
 Miles, Frank, 12, 24  
 Miles, Robert, 199  
 Mill, John Stuart, 212  
 Millais, John Everett, 12, 17  
 Miller, George O., 94  
 Miller, Joaquin, 49, 158-159, 207, 276,  
     436-438  
 Millet, F. D., 49  
 Miln, Rev. George W., 289  
 Moffat, David, 293, 298  
 Moody, Dwight L., 308  
 Morgan, J. Pierpont, 42  
 Mormons, 270-280, 307, 355, 365  
 Morris, Clara, 39, 45, 65, 226  
 Morris, Frank, "first man to build a silo  
     in America," 441  
 Morris, William, 65, 276  
 Morrissey, John, 84-85  
 Morse, Colonel W. F., 22-24, 35, 39, 54,  
     57-59, 62, 77-80, 98-102, 122, 379, 391,  
     442  
 Mother Hubbard, fashion in dress, 140  
 Moulton, Louisa Chandler, 71-72  
 Mulvaney, James, 327  
 Murray, Captain George Siddons, 32  
 Murphy, Frances, 398  
 Nasby, Petroleum V., 107, 222  
 Nast, Thomas, 222  
 Nation, Carrie, 365

- Nelson, Emma, 285-287  
 Nelson, William R., 329-330  
 New, Harry S., 196  
 "New Helen, The," 13  
 Newdigate Poetry Prize, 9  
 Niagara Falls, 162-164, 419-420  
 Nichols, Mrs. Maria Longworth, 188, 190,  
 200-201  
 Nicolay, John G., 378  
 Nilsson, Christine, 16, 418, 443  
 Nixon, William Penn, 170  
 Normile, Colonel J. C., 210  
 Nye, Bill, 140
- O'Brien, William Smith, 216  
 O'Connor, T. P., 26  
 O'Reilly, John Boyle, 116, 222  
 O'Reilly, Dr. Thomas, 210  
 Ornauer, H., the Denver tailor, 287, 325  
 Orth, Godlove S., 322  
 Osborne, Howell, 379  
 "Oscar Crazy Quilt, The," 391  
 Otero, Miguel, 301-302  
*Our Continent*, 71-72, 356  
 Oxford University, 9-10
- Pacific Mail Steamship Company, 86, 249  
 "Park," newspaper correspondent, 418,  
 428  
 Parker, Theodore, 104, 110, 112  
*Patience*, 3-7, 21-24, 38, 46, 54, 58, 65,  
 172, 195  
 Patti, Adelina, 217, 377  
 "Paul, John," 422  
 Pendleton, George H., 89  
 Perkins, Eli, 385-387  
 Perzel, William, 442  
 Pfeffer, Fred, 411  
 Pigeon, Richard, 25-26, 434  
*Pinafore*, 4-6, 246  
 Pinkerton, Allan, 70, 234  
 Pinkerton Detective Agency, 70, 234, 266  
 Pinkham, Lydia, 100  
*Pirates of Penzance, The*, 5-7  
 Pishon, Charles, 316-317  
 "Plain Talk from Truthful James," poem  
 by Bret Harte, 249  
 "Pocket Rifle, The," 261  
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 373, 404  
 Pond, Major J. B., 222  
 Porter, James D., 197-198  
 Portora School, 8  
*Postlethwaite, Jellaby*, Du Maurier's  
 character in *Punch*, 4-5, 11, 19, 21, 28-  
 29, 46  
 Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 17-18, 58  
 Prescott, Marie, 442  
 Press Club, New York, 420-421  
*Primer of Politeness, The*, 112  
 Prince of Wales, 12, 28  
 Princess of Wales, 25, 28  
 Probasco, Henry, 201  
 Pugh, A. H., 441
- Pulitzer, Joseph, 204  
*Punch*, 4-6, 11, 14, 19-21, 23, 27-28  
 "Quad, M., 181
- Ralston, W. C., 245  
 Ransome, Arthur, 13  
 "Ravenna," 9  
 Redpath, James, 221-222  
 Reed, Colonel Nate, 406  
 Rehan, Ada, 36  
 Remenyi, Edward, 38  
 Reynolds, Dr. Henry S., 396  
 Richie, Marshall T. H., of St. Joseph,  
 Mo., 339-340  
 Ridgway, J. H., 98  
 Riley, James Whitecomb, 107, 195  
 Robeson, George Maxwell, 83-84, 89, 429  
 Robeson, Mrs. George Maxwell, 89  
 Rochester Maennerchor, 155  
 Rochester Students, 156-158  
 Rockefeller, John D., 43  
 Rockwood Pottery, 190  
 Rodd, Rennell, 78, 344  
 Rogers, Jennie, 285  
 Roosevelt, Robert, 45  
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 45  
 Root, John, 176  
 Rosebery, Lord Archibald Philip Prim-  
 rose, 49  
 Rosengarten, J. G., 71, 73  
 Ross, Charlie, 347  
 Ross, Morris, 196  
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 17, 339  
 Rossetti, William Michael, 49  
 Rossi, Ernesto, 170  
 Rothaker, Ottamar H., 289-291, 320  
 Ruskin, John, 10, 17, 70, 161-162, 187,  
 205, 208, 214  
 Russell, Lillian, 39, 379, 426  
 Ryan, Paddy, 173, 379  
 Ryder-Taylor, H., 364-365  
 Ryley, J. H., 54
- Salsbury, Nate, 200  
 Saltus, Edgar, 431-432  
 San Mateo County, California, case in  
 law, 69  
 Sarony, photographer, 39, 418-419  
 Sartoris, Nellie, 89  
 Savage, James W., 229  
 Scammon, Mrs. J. Young, 217  
 Schenck, Robert C., 85  
 Schwester, Clare, 144  
*Science and Health*, 112  
*Scouts of the Prairie and Red Devilry*  
*As It Is, The*, 37  
 Scoville, George, 96, 206  
 Scoville, Mrs. George, 412  
 Scoville, Louis, 412  
 Sellick, "Hungry Joe," 439  
*Servia*, Steamship, 60  
*Shambrun, The*, 115

- Shanley, Father, 224  
 Shaw, Henry, 210  
 Sherard, Robert H., 13, 128, 383, 404, 443  
 Sherman, John, 406  
 "Shoddyites," 138, 380  
 Silk, Mattie, 285  
 Simmons, D. J., 252-253  
 Skiff, Frederick, Jr., 289-290, 321  
 Skinner, Otis, 36  
 Smith, Soapy, 301  
 Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 412-415  
 "Sonnet to Liberty," 244  
 "Sophie Sparkle," 385  
 Sopris, Judge, Denver jurist, 286, 301  
*Sorcerer, The*, 4  
 Southworth, Mrs. Emma D. E. N., 378  
 Speed, Mrs. Phillip (Emma Keats), 193  
 Spencer, Herbert, 151, 422-423  
 Spofford, Harriet Prescott, 146  
 Standard Oil Company, 43  
 Stanley, Henry M., 340  
*Starin, Laura M.*, harbor boat, 416  
 Stanton, Mrs. Elizabeth Cady, 109-110, 134  
 Stapleton, W. H., 322  
 Stedman, Edmund Clarence, 45  
 Stedman, Mrs. Edmund Clarence, 45, 115  
 Stein, Orth, 322-324  
 Stevens, Mrs. Paran, 63  
 Stewart, A. T., 340, 413  
 Stoddard, Richard Henry, 45  
 Stoddart, J. M., 71, 73, 77  
 Stokley, William S., 71, 390  
 Stone, Judge A. W., 310  
 Stone, Mrs. H. O., 174  
 Stone, Lucy, 109  
 Stone, Melville E., 165  
 Storey, Wilbur F., 171  
 Storrs, Emory, 386  
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 106-107  
 Strasser, Adolph, 70  
*Strikers, Communists and Detectives*, by Allan Pinkerton, 70  
 Sturgeon, Lizzie, 36  
*Suit-a-more*, drama, 115  
 Sullivan, Sir Arthur, 4-7  
 Sullivan, John L., 173-174  
 Sumner, Charles, 49  
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 9, 18, 20, 65  
 Swing, Professor David, 212-215  
 Tabor, H. A. W., 293, 297-301, 306, 314-316, 412  
 Talmage, Thomas De Witt, 132, 222, 392  
 Tanner, Dr. Henry S., 36-38, 412  
 Taylor, John, 277, 307  
 Taylor, Tom, 418  
 Thewatt, ticket agent, Atlanta, 373  
 Teller, Willard, 293, 297, 392  
 Temperance, 379, 395-403  
 Temple College, 129  
 Tennyson, Alfred, 76  
 Terry, Ellen, 15, 378  
 Thackeray, William M., 103  
 Thomas, Theodore, 170, 201  
 Thompson, Lydia, 171  
 Tilden, Samuel J., 392  
 Tillman, Benjamin R., 357  
 Tilton, Theodore, 130, 133-135, 154, 200  
 Tilton, Mrs. Theodore, 134-135  
 Time, English periodical, 13  
 Toner, Michael, 35  
 Tourgee, Albion W., 71, 356-357  
 Townsend, George Alfred, "Gath," 61  
 Townsend, Mrs. Mary Ashley, 363  
 Tracy, "General Peter," 355, 358, 371, 376  
 Traguer, W. M., 204  
*Trial by Jury*, 4  
 Trinity College, Dublin, 8-9  
*Troubadours*, The, 200  
 Trowbridge, J. T., 261  
 Trudell, Frank, 176  
*Truth*, English periodical, 25  
 Tulane, Paul, 360  
 Turner, Joseph Mallord William, 168  
 Twain, Mark, 93, 107-108, 219-220, 222, 307, 340, 360  
 Vale, J. H., 154-156, 163, 183-184, 202, 204, 229, 231, 303-304, 353  
 Vanderbilt, William H., 42, 188, 237-238, 384, 405, 440; "Public Be Damned," 406-407  
 Vedder, Elihu, 49  
*Vera, or The Nihilists*, 24-25, 32, 115, 226, 306, 409-410, 431-432, 442  
 Victoria, Queen, 12  
 Volk, Leonard, 169  
 Vorhees, Daniel, 194  
 Wallace, Lew, 195  
 Wallace, William, 267  
 Walker, Mrs. Jeanette E., 44  
 Walker, Dr. Mary, 124  
 Wallack, Lester, 35, 39, 425  
 Waller, John Francis, 269  
 Ward, Artemus, 107  
 Ward, Emily Astor, 51-52  
 Ward, Mrs. H. O., 139  
 Ward, Louisa, 52  
 Ward, Sam, 49-54, 60, 84-88, 118, 354-355, 382-383, 438  
 Warder, Colonel George W., 331-332  
 Warner, Charles Dudley, 340  
 Washington Total Abstinence Society, 396-397  
 Watterson, Henry, 44, 135, 192-194  
 West, Charles F., 188  
 Wheeler, Joseph, 377  
 Whistler, James McNeill, 6, 15-16, 18, 20  
 Whitman, Walt, 65, 74-77, 88, 118, 164, 276, 343-344, 347-348, 378, 404  
 Whittier, John G., 104

- Wilde, Lady Jane Algee, 8, 24, 216, 225, 339, 441
- Wilde, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie, birth, 8; parentage, 8; education, 8-10, 46, 64; influenced by Ruskin, 10; joins cult of Aesthetes, 10, 17; physical courage, 8, 10; moves to London, 10; talks of life in London, 46; in love with Lily Langtry, 12-13, 26, 416-438; personal appearance, 9, 12, 31, 55, 62, 127, 160-161, 242, 279, 332; adopts dress reform, 16; meets Sarah Bernhardt, 13; association with Whistler, 16; caricatured by Du Maurier, 5, 9, 11, 14, 19, 20-21, 23; satirized by Gilbert and Sullivan, 6-8; satirized by F. C. Burnand, 6-7; induced to visit America as advertisement for *Patience*, 7-8, 22-25; departs for America, 3, 25; arrives in America, 31; misquoted on own age, 31; in New York, 35-61; out-drinks New Yorkers, 53-54; given dinner by Sam Ward, 50; morals, 56; lecture début in Chickering Hall, New York, 57-60; in Philadelphia and Camden, 62-79; altercation with Archibald Forbes, 79-82; in Washington, 82-102; lampooned by *Washington Post*, 98-102; Baltimore "scandal," 79-82, 102; in Albany, 103; in Boston, 104-128; Howe-Higginson controversy over Wilde, 118-121; lampooned by Harvard students, 122-129; in New Haven, 129; in Hartford, 129; in Brooklyn, 129-134; in Utica, 154-155; in Rochester, 155-157; in Buffalo, 160-162; at Niagara Falls, 162-164; in Chicago, 164-179; introduces "Decorative Arts" lecture, 177; rumpus over his comments on Chicago's water tower, 172-179; in Fort Wayne, 181; in Detroit, 181-182; in Cleveland, 182-183; in Cincinnati, 188-192, 198-201; in Louisville, 192-193; in Indianapolis, 193-198; in St. Louis, 202-211; in Springfield, 211; returns to Chicago, 211; in Dubuque, Rock Island, Rockford, Aurora, 211-212; dispute with Swing, 212-215; in Racine, 215; in Milwaukee, 215-216; returns to Chicago, 216; introduces "Interior and Exterior Decoration of Houses," 218, 223; in Minneapolis, St. Paul, 223-226; in Sioux City, 226-227; in Omaha, 227-231; en route to San Francisco, 231-245; in and around San Francisco, 245-270; outdrinks Bohemian Club members, 255; writes and delivers lecture "Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century," 255, 269-270; in Salt Lake City, 275-280; in Denver, 282-308; in Leadville, 308-318; in Colorado Springs, 320; returns to Denver, 322-325; burlesqued by Eugene Field, 320-322; in Kansas City, 326-332; in St. Joseph, 333-336; in Leavenworth, 336-337; in Lawrence, 337; in Atchison, 337-338; in Dayton, 341-343; in Columbus, Ohio, 343; in Philadelphia again, 343, 349; reported second meeting with Whitman, 343-344; returns to New York, 344; lectures second time in New York, 344-347; in Montreal, 348-349; in Ottawa, 350; returns to Montreal, 351; in Toronto, 351-353; reported to speak in Woodstock and Hamilton, 353; lectures second time in Boston, 354; lectures second time in Cincinnati, 355-356; in Memphis, 356-359; in Vicksburg, 359; in New Orleans, 361-363; in Houston, 364; in Galveston, 364; in San Antonio, 364-365; returns to Houston, 365; returns to New Orleans, 366-367; in Mobile, 369, 371; in Montgomery, 369-370; in Columbus, Georgia, 370; in White Sulphur Springs, 371; in Macon, 371; in Atlanta, 371-373; in Augusta, 374; in Charleston, 374; in Wilmington, 375; in Norfolk, 375-376; in Richmond, 376; in Newport, 382; in Long Branch, 383; in Balliston Spa, 383-384; in Saratoga, 384-388; in Long Beach, 388; returns to New York, 388-389; in Long Branch, 389; in Cape May, 389-390; returns to Boston, 395-403; in Providence, 395, 404; in Pawtucket, 395; in North Attleboro, 395; in Bangor, 395-396; in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, 395; in Halifax, 404; in St. John, N. B., 404; in Moncton, 404; lawsuit with Moncton Y.M.C.A., 404-405; returns to New York, 410; meets Lily Langtry at boat, 416-418; at Langtry New York début as drama critic, 426-428; victimized by "confidence man," 438-440; departs for England, 444-445; financial aspects of tour, 28, 60, 73, 102-103, 123, 177, 181, 183, 197, 208, 212, 223, 226, 247, 250, 253, 275, 304, 320, 334, 338, 347, 364, 371-372, 374, 376-377, 442-443
- Wilde, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie, quoted on art and climate, 243, 306; art and democracy, 64, 177, 217, 242, 324; art and industry, 167, 242; art and luxury, 243; art and nature, 306, 314; art and peace, 200, 324; "Atlantic Ocean a disappointment," 32-33; Anderson, Mary, 47; "bad art merits death," 318; "California is an Italy without its art," 306; "Charmides," 244; Chinese art, 245, 248-249, 252, 254; Chicago's water tower, 178-179; Davis, Jefferson, 367-369, 372-373; dress reform, 46-47, 276; Du Maurier, 46; Duveneck, Frank, 342; "dust bloom











